CHINESE LITERATURE

CONTENTS

CHOU YANG: The Practice of Mao Tse-tung's Thought in Chinese Art and Literature

KUNG CHUEH & YUAN CHING: Daughters and Sons

LI CHI: Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-hsiang

LU CHI: The Blast Furnace

LIU PAI-YU: At Six A.M.

TING LING: To the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea

WEI WEI: Reports from the Korean Front

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LI CHUANG: The Flame of Vengeance

CHAI CHUAN-JO: The American Prisoners

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1

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CHINESE LITERATURE

FIRST COLLECTION

CONTENTS

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第一輯目錄

周　揚：堅決貫徹毛澤東文藝路線……5
孔厥、袁靜：新兒女英雄傳……19
李季：王貴與李香香……203
魯琪：爐……223
劉白羽：早晨六點鐘……235
丁玲：寄給在朝鮮的中國人民志願部隊……245
魏巍：朝鮮前線通訊……252
　一、誰是最可愛的人
　二、戰士和祖國
　三、冬天和春天
　四、漢江南岸的日日夜夜
楊朔：平常的人……268
李莊：復仇的火焰……272
柴川若：志願軍與美軍俘虜……275

LI CHUANG — The Flame of Vengeance 272

CHAI CHUAN-JO — The American Prisoners 275

Plates

KU YUAN — Chairman Mao Chatting with Villagers
LO KUNG-LIU — The Militiamen in Action
TENG SHU — We Sign for Peace
HSIAO CHUAN-CHIU — The Alliance of Workers and Peasants
LIN CHING-SUN — We Have the Strength to Protect Our New Life

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CONTENTS

CHOU YANG — The Practice of Mao Tse-tung's Thought in Chinese Art and Literature 5

KUNG CHUEH & YUAN CHING — Daughters and Sons .. 19

LI CHI — Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-hsiang 203

LU CHI — The Blast Furnace 223

LIU PAI-YU — At Six A.M. 235

TING LING — To the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea . 245

WEI WEI — Reports from the Korean Front 252

YANG SUO — An Ordinary Man 268

LI CHUANG — The Flame of Vengeance 272

CHAI CHUAN-JO — The American Prisoners 275

Plates

KU YUAN — Chairman Mao Chatting with Villagers
LO KUNG-LIU — The Militiamen in Action
TENG SHU — We Sign for Peace
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CHOU YANG

THE PRACTICE OF MAO TSE-TUNG'S THOUGHT IN CHINESE ART AND LITERATURE

— a lecture given at the Central Institute of Literature —

Art and literature are amongst the strongest weapons for inculcating upon the broad masses the Communist outlook and the people's democratic revolution. Since the May Fourth Movement, the main current of art and literature has developed under the guidance of Communist ideas and the Communist Party, and has been an integral part of the Chinese people's great struggles against imperialism and feudalism. Comrade Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yenan Literary Meeting* brought the new art and literature to a new historical stage. If the May Fourth Movement laid the foundations for the first revolution in the modern history of Chinese literature, then the publication of the Talks, with the changes in literature brought about by it, may be regarded as the second, but more penetrating revolution after May Fourth. These talks not only wiped the floor with all the reactionary art and literature of imperialism and feudalism, but also seriously and severely criticised the various petty bourgeois thoughts and trends in art and literature. As petty bourgeois thoughts are deep-rooted in the progressive literary world, and revolutionary petty bourgeois writers and artists often dress up as proletarians, the ideological demarcation line between the proletariate and the petty bourgeoisie becomes easily blurred. Hence it is an extremely important, difficult and complex task on the ideological battlefront to distinguish proletarian ideas from all non-proletarian ideas, to safeguard the purity and seriousness of proletarian ideas, and to draw the revolutionary petty bour-

geois writers and artists to the purely proletarian side. Comrade Mao Tse-tung rightly put forward the principle that art and literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. This involves the problem of reforming the writers' outlook, their thoughts and sensibility. And here lies the key to all the problems. It is from this key point that Comrade Mao Tse-tung has solved the problem of uniting art and literature with the broad masses. This is a problem which we have attempted, but failed to solve since May Fourth. Mao Tse-tung's literary theory has armed all the revolutionary writers and artists within and without the Party, guided them to the path of identifying themselves with the masses of workers and peasants, and given a new aspect to literature. In July 1949, three months before the inauguration of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, a conference of delegates of literary and art workers from the whole nation was held in Peking. At the conference, a preliminary report was made on the fruits of literary and art creation since the Yenan Literary Meeting. Mao Tse-tung's theory won the unanimous support of literary and art workers of all branches and of all opinions. His *Talks at the Yenan Literary Meeting* became the militant common programme for the literary and art movement in New China. During the past two years Mao Tse-tung's literary theory has been widely spread amongst the intellectuals of the whole country. Under its guidance there have been many new achievements in art and literature, effecting a further and closer union with the worker-peasant-soldier masses.

Among comparatively outstanding works during the past two years, we may mention the following: portraying the struggles and heroism of the People's Liberation Army, there are Liu Pai-yu's *The Flames Are Ahead,* Ku Li-kao's *Always Looking Forward,* Han Feng's *Yin Ch'ing Ch'ung,* Han Hsi-liang's *Sixty-eight Days* (all stories), Ch'iao Fu-shun's *Storm at Sea* (a reportage) Hu K'o's *Matured in Battle* (a play), and recently some well-written reports from the Korean front, such as Wei Wei's *Those Most to Be Loved.* Presenting heroic tales of the people's struggles against their enemies during the War of Resistance against Japan and during the People's Liberation War, there are Hsu Kuang-Yao's *Fire Rages over the Plain,* Chen Teng-ko's *Mrs. Tu* and *Living Hell* (all stories). Describing the violent changes that took place in the life and thought of the labouring people in some slum quarters of the cities after liberation, there are Lao Sheh's *Fang Chen-chu* and *Dragon Beard*

Sewer (two plays). Depicting rural reconstruction and the peasants' new life, there are Ko Fu's *The Dyke* (a play), Pai Wei's *Fight against Famine,* Wang An-yu's *Mrs. Li Gets Married Again,* Chao Shu-li's *Registration* and Ku Yu's *New Ways of Doing New Things* (all stories). Describing industrial reconstruction, there are Chao Hsi's *They Begin to Reform* (a story) and Tu Yin's *Face to Face with New Reality* (a play).

It is noteworthy that new writers have appeared from among the worker-peasant masses. Chen Teng-ko, the author of *Mrs. Tu* and *Living Hell,* came of a poor peasant family and was himself a poor peasant. He learned to read and write only after he had joined the Liberation Army. His works have proved that he is an outstanding and promising writer. He conveys the strong and genuine emotions and the stubborn strength of the labouring people. In his works it is not the writer who speaks, but life itself, for life is a storm of struggles which can cause great upheavals.

The people's cinema is the youngest of all the arts but it is also the most popular and powerful art form. During the past two years the most successful works in the film industry have been *The White Haired Girl, Steeled Fighters, Shang Jao Concentration Camp, Daughters and Sons, Inner Mongolian People's Victory,* and *United till Tomorrow.* The people's cinema has won the enthusiasm of the broad masses. Determinedly freeing itself from the Hollywood influence, it has begun to build up a style of cinematographic art that belongs to the Chinese nation and the worker-peasant masses.

The reformation of old popular art forms, especially plays and ballads, has made remarkable strides. The vast number of artist-performers have shown an unprecedented political enthusiasm and revolutionary spirit in their work. They have created numerous plays and ballads. The reformation of old-style new year pictures and picture-books has resulted in the creation of a new content and new form. The new opera developed from the original *Yanko* opera in the Northwest has spread throughout the country, giving a stimulus to the new development of various local folk operas and music, which in turn are assimilated in the creation of the new opera. Folk dancing has seen a rapid development and is not without some new inventions.

The popular nature of our art and literature has manifested itself in the amateur literary activities of the broad worker-peasant-soldier masses. Such activities have become an important

part of the cultural life of the masses and are one of the major forms of their self-education. Our literature and art are composed of two parts: professional activities and the amateur activities of the masses. Amateur theatrical groups and other cultural and recreation organisations are widespread in the village, army and factory. The masses write and perform their own works and have produced many fine pieces. The plays *No Longer a Cicada* and *Door No. 6* and the poems and drawings produced by the workers have shown the creative genius of the Chinese working class.

Every achievement we have made in our literature is the result of our correct execution of Mao Tse-tung's line of thought in literature. The achievements are small when compared with the Chinese people's great struggles and their attainments. There are many reasons for this, but the chief one is that we have not fully carried out Mao Tse-tung's literary line. This line is, in short, the class line and the mass line in literature. To make our literature serve the people, especially the workers, peasants and soldiers, writers and artists should identify themselves with the worker-peasant-soldier masses. Without this, literary creation would be severed from its sources and writers and artists would lose the basis for their ideological reformation.

In his great work *On Practice,* Comrade Mao Tse-tung explains in a most profound and precise way the truth that knowledge cannot be separated from practice. He says: "If anyone wants to know something he cannot do otherwise than to come into contact with that thing, that is, to live (practise) in its setting," and again, "If one wants to know directly some things or some kinds of things one can do so only through personal participation in the practical struggle to change existing conditions, to change those things or those kinds of things. Only thus can one come into contact with the phenomena of those things or those kinds of things; and only thus can the essence of those things or those kinds of things be revealed or understood." Art and literature are amongst the means to know the existing conditions. If a writer wants to truthfully portray the reality he must personally participate in the practical struggle to change existing conditions.

In his *Talks at the Yenan Literary Meeting* Comrade Mao Tse-tung makes the following call to the literary and art workers: "The revolutionary writers and artists of China, the promising writers and artists, should go into the midst of the masses. They should permanently, unconditionally and wholeheartedly go over to the

worker-peasant-soldier masses, into the heat of the struggle, to the most unique, the largest and richest source, to observe, experience, study and analyse all kinds of people, all the classes and all the masses, all the active forms of life and struggle and all the art and literature in their natural state. Only then can they enter upon the finishing or creative stage. Thus the raw material and production, the course of research and the course of creation are unified." This is a fundamental directive. Practically all our literary and art workers support Comrade Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yenan Literary Meeting* — indeed the overwhelming majority wholeheartedly support it. But when it comes to the fundamental problem of uniting with the worker-peasant-soldier masses our writers and artists are vague and faltering and even evince an unfriendly attitude towards it. Comrade Mao Tse-tung wants us to go into the struggle of the masses "permanently, unconditionally and wholeheartedly", whereas some of our writers often do so "temporarily, conditionally and half-heartedly". Comrade Mao Tse-tung wants us to throw ourselves into the "heat of the struggle", whereas some of our writers often stand outside the "heat of the struggle". There are writers who even hold that every sort of life has its significance and that it is not necessary to seek after the life of struggle of the masses. Thus they seek to justify their present state of segregation from the masses and from reality. Comrade Mao Tse-tung wants us to "observe, experience, study and analyse all kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the active forms of life and struggle", but some of our writers limit their creative perspective to a very narrow sphere. Formulism in literature is characterised by the principle of describing the complex, many-sided and diversified phenomena of life as simplified, one-sided and uniform. The formulists observe or describe life not as variegated but as stereotyped. They have not only simplified the complicated phenomena of life, but have vulgarised the real politics, the politics of the masses. On the other hand the formalists make up colourful stories, substituting artificial "dramatic" conflicts and complicated plots for the dialectics of living, thus covering up the emptiness of their conception of life. Both formulism and formalism originate chiefly in the departure from reality and from the masses. In some departments of art and literature, and in some of our comrades there is a serious tendency to depart from reality and from the masses. This is most harmful to present-day literary and art activities.

Once our literary and art workers depart from the masses and from reality, they are bound to be invaded by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas, and become slaves to these ideas. The tendency to depart from the masses and from reality is, in the words of Lenin, "one of the greatest evils left to us by capitalist society". If our art and literature are to benefit the workers, peasants and soldiers, and be of fundamental service to them, then our guiding literary principle should not be that of the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie, but of the proletariate. For it is only with a proletarian outlook that we can understand the workers, peasants and other classes; it is only with a proletarian method of art (revolutionary realism) that we can mirror the lives of the workers, peasants and other classes. It is only thus that we can guarantee that art and literature will constantly meet the needs of the masses and of the practical struggles. Therefore our foremost task at present is to carry out Mao Tse-tung's literary line in all our literary work and to struggle against all deviations from this line.

In his opening speech at the People's Political Consultative Conference, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said: "The Chinese people, numbering one-fourth of the human race, are now standing on their own feet. Our people have always been a great, courageous and industrious people. It was only in modern times that they fell behind. This was entirely due to the oppression and exploitation of foreign imperialism and a reactionary government at home. . . . Our nation will never live in humiliation again. We are indeed standing on our own feet now." This solemn proclamation defines the Chinese people's exact role on the modern world stage. To portray the Chinese people now "standing on their own feet" has become the central theme of patriotic art and literature.

Our literature has always been patriotic. That is to say, it has always opposed imperialist and feudalist oppression and is filled with a hatred against all aggressors and oppressors and a deep concern over the fate of our nation. Now the Chinese people have overthrown the rule of foreign and domestic reactionaries and have established their own power — the People's Democratic Dictatorship. The present tasks of the Chinese people are: to resist America and aid Korea and to continue to oppose imperialist aggression; to carry out the Agrarian Reform and to completely destroy feudalism; to suppress and wipe out the reactionaries; to restore and develop production, thereby freeing China from the economically and culturally

KU YUAN: Chairman Mao Chatting with Villagers

KU YUAN: Chairman Mao Chatting with Villagers

backward state which is the result of her past history, and turning her into a prosperous nation with a rich culture. The Chinese people are now carrying on the struggle to fulfil these great historical tasks. Forged in the course of long revolutionary struggles and trained under the people's democratic system, the industrious and brave Chinese people have steadily raised their political understanding.

New personalities are continually emerging from among the people: model heroes, models in production and in various other spheres of work. Our art and literature should first of all portray such outstanding persons, portray the great strength of the Chinese nation and the Chinese Communist Party, portray their great wisdom and their heroism. The long ruthless rule of imperialism and feudalism over the Chinese people has on the one hand given rise to the Chinese people's boundless fortitude and determination in revolution, but on the other hand it has also given rise to a certain sense of national inferiority amongst a section of the people. This sense of national inferiority is connected with the wavering and weak character inherent in the Chinese bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Art and literature should help the people to wipe out this feeling of inferiority caused by the humiliating position of the nation for a long time past, and to build up a national pride which the great Chinese people should have, and which is compatible with the present position of our country. Art and literature should at the same time enhance the people's confidence in their own great strength and in their bright future. It is a cause for regret that our literature has not yet fully performed these tasks. It has not fully portrayed the strength of the Chinese people now standing on their own feet. As portrayed in literature the characters often do not stand on their own feet. Sometimes they are bent and warped, even in their physical appearance. The crimes and atrocities of the people's enemies — imperialists, feudalists, and all other reactionaries should of course be forcefully exposed, but some works wrongly present the strength of the enemy as surpassing that of the people, and even describe with great interest the imperialists' acts of insulting our people, quite unconscious of the harm this can do to our national prestige.

The Chinese people have won today's victory after long and extremely hard struggles. They have finally got out of the tragic fate of life in the past and begun to build their own new life. The old, dark and tragic era is gone for ever. But some of our art works

still dwell on the simple and painful recollections of the past tragic life, without amply describing the reality of the new happy life of the people today, and the visions of a still better life tomorrow. It is very necessary to have works which record the history of the bitter and bloody struggles of the people, but we should not let the painful recollections of history weigh too heavily on us.

Our literature traces the people's hard course of reforming themselves amidst struggles. Such works are very necessary. The course of reform will be a long-term one, and our literature should mirror and aid this course, so as to help the people gradually to raise themselves to the democratic and socialist levels of political consciousness. But some literary works are too enthusiastic in presenting negative characters or describing remaining backward elements amongst the people. They do not, or cannot describe positive characters or describe the new elements amongst the people. Some writers going into the midst of the masses see only backward conditions which perplex them. They do not realise that it is the progressive positive factor rather than the backward negative factor which is effective and determines all movements and struggles. Some writers, even when presenting positive characters, do not stress their new and high qualities, but try to probe their souls for weak qualities.

Ting Ke-sing's story *Old Worker Kuo Fu-shan* in *People's Literature* (No. 1. Vol. IV) is an example of this. The story tells of Kuo Fu-shan's son, Kuo Chan-hsiang, who is described by the author as an exemplary character in all respects. He was a leader of the railway workers, "capable, having prestige, and unanimously supported by the local Party members", was secretary of the Party branch in the workshop section. When the American imperialists' war of aggression on Korea broke out, and when the enemy planes began to bomb our territory, this hero suddenly turned coward and became "a weakling, afraid of planes, of bombing and of death". It turned out that he had been conscripted by the Japanese and made a forced labourer in Northern Manchuria. One night the Japanese killed over two hundred labourers with machine guns but he managed to escape from among the dead. After that he was scared to death whenever he heard the rattle of machine guns. His old father, a non-Party member, asked the Party branch to expel his unworthy son, but the general branch secretary was lenient and only relieved him of his secretaryship. Then, under the influence of his father he ceased to fear the aero-

planes and "both father and son became heroes". Obviously the author not only distorts the image of a model Party member, but also completely ignores the function of Party training and leadership. It appears that a model Party member was inferior to an ordinary old workman; that at a critical moment a man's behaviour was decided not by the level of political understanding which he had attained, but by the physical, mental defects and abnormalities resulting from a certain cause; that the violent and vicious acts of the imperialists could scare the Chinese workers; that a Party member's errors were corrected, not by Party education, but by his father's influence. Throughout the incident, the decisive factor is the physical one, not the political one; the family relation is the important one, not his relation to the Party. Is it not obvious that such a work, from the point of view of its political and ideological content is entirely erroneous?

As a contrast, Han Feng's story *Yin Ch'ing-ch'ung* in the same journal (No. 2. Vol. II) powerfully presents the new qualities of the people's fighters. The hero Yin Ch'ing-ch'ung has his defects. He violates some rules of discipline in battle and as a result of this fails to get admitted to the Party. This is a source of pain to him, and his determination to fight for admission to the Party dominates his whole life. He can withstand all kinds of trials. He is rightly described by the Political Commissar as "a man of iron". "Some people do not fear the enemy, but are overwhelmed by personal difficulties. This man, however, is afraid of nothing and remains firm wherever he is." Finally he receives a citation and is admitted to the Party. When his admission is approved he says: "This is an honour given me by the Party. At any critical time, I gain strength when I think of the Party. Otherwise of what use would I be?"

If a soldier fights with courage simply for the sake of defending his home and his possessions, if a peasant attends actively to production simply for the sake of getting rich, then the soldier or the peasant should not be regarded as a new character. A man is a new character, and his qualities new qualities, only when he is so politically conscious that he can fight for the common good and can put the interest of his country and of all the people before self-interest.

Our literary and art works should portray the new qualities of the new people, depict the heroic qualities of Communist Party members, using their valiant and exemplary deeds to teach the

broad masses and the youth. This is the most important task in our creative work.

Another problem of patriotism is to deal with historical characters and traditions. In his book *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*, Comrade Mao Tse-tung says: "The Chinese nation is not only well-known for its industriousness, but it is also a peace-loving nation with a revolutionary tradition. . . . In the over three thousand years of history of the Chinese people, many national heroes and revolutionary leaders have appeared. So the Chinese nation also has a glorious revolutionary tradition and a fine historical heritage." We should approve and commend the heroes of past generations who have helped to turn the wheels of history and who have to their credit achievements which benefited the people. But it is not permissible to dress up as revolutionary heroes the reactionaries in history, as is done in the film *The Life of Wu Hsun*. At the same time, in describing the revolutionary heroes, we should not let our commendation and praise go against historical facts. No revolutionary hero in history should be compared with the great leaders of the modern working class. That kind of comparison would be an error in principle. Once Emil Ludwig, a German bourgeois writer, had an audience with Stalin. When he proposed to compare him with Peter the Great, Stalin said in opposition to this kind of historical comparison that if a comparison was made between Peter the Great and Lenin, then "Peter the Great is only as a drop of water in the ocean whilst Lenin is as the whole boundless ocean itself." This is an important principle for our appraisal of historical personages.

The people's new literature should be linked up with the fine traditions of our national art and literature, so as to develop and amplify the national form of art and literature.

Our literary and art heritage is indeed very rich. Comrade Mao Tse-tung says in his *On New Democracy:* "China created a glorious culture of the old time in its feudal society that lasted for a long period. Therefore, combing the course of development of ancient culture, scraping off its feudal dregs and absorbing its democratic essence is the prerequisite for developing national new culture and raising national self-confidence. But we should by no means take over everything uncritically. Instead we should distinguish all rotten things of the old-time feudal ruling class from the old-time folk-culture, and from the things that are more or less

democratic and revolutionary. The new politics and new economy of present-day China are developments of the old politics and old economy of ancient times. The new culture of present-day China is a development of the old culture of ancient times. Therefore we should respect our history and on no account cut ourselves off from it." It is a harmful view of history to presume that the new culture is entirely transplanted from the West and that it does not grow spontaneously on our national soil; that the national new culture can be developed without the indispensable critical work of combing the course of development of ancient culture; that national new culture can have nothing to do with national old culture. Many literary and art workers, as well as young people, blindly worship the West and look down upon the traditions of national art and literature, the folk art forms and the likes and tastes of the masses — a proof that they have lost their national confidence and lack the mass viewpoint. This constitutes a serious obstacle to the popularisation and the advancement of art and literature. Of course we are no ultra-nationalists. We should learn from foreign countries, especially the Soviet Union. The art and literature of socialist realism are the best spiritual food for the Chinese people and the broad masses of intellectual youth and in future we shall further intensify the work of translation in order to introduce them to it. It is for the sake of creating our own experience that we should learn from the experiences of advanced countries. If we respect the history and cultural traditions of other nations, we should the more respect the history and cultural traditions of our own nation, otherwise we are neither true patriots nor true internationalists. Any true internationalist should not start with his own hands empty. We fall far short in literary and art techniques and need to learn and advance ourselves. Learning technique, however, is not the same as copying from Western forms. It is for the sake of developing and enriching our own national forms.

In the matter of form, language is the chief factor. Comrade Stalin said, "As languages and customs vary with the peoples who take part in the socialist reconstruction, the proletarian culture, with socialism as its content, is expressed in different forms and modes." Languages and customs should be learned from the people's practical life and from our people's traditional art and literature. Comrade Mao Tse-tung regards language as of paramount importance. Of course language is not the only factor. There are others. Concise and natural language; distinct and clear-cut characters;

plots with a coherent thread running through them; all this we should learn from the fine traditions of our literature. Our literature should overcome its defect of unpopularity, and we should realise that popularisation is inseparable from nationalism. "It often happens in the history of literature," said Lu Hsun, "that when the old literature is on the decline it undergoes a new change when it absorbs (new strength) from the folk literature or foreign literature." This new change has taken place in China. It is the course of development and the path of China's new literature from *May Fourth* to the *Talks at the Yenan Literary Meeting*. Every effort should be made to hasten the completion of this change.

To inherit the fine traditions of national art we should on the one hand broaden the work of collecting, arranging and studying, and on the other hand try to reform the old art forms most popular among the masses.

The heritage of the Chinese drama is very rich. It preserves many fine historical stories and legends. Up till now this drama form is still loved by the broad masses. There is a great variety of drama forms in the whole country. Local dramas are marked with the characteristics of local dialects, music and customs. We should carry on a wide research and reformation of the various local dramas, folk operettas and ballads, so that they can develop on a new basis. According to Comrade Mao Tse-tung's instructions and the "Directive on Drama Reform" promulgated by the Central People's Government, the main directive for drama reform is to encourage the free emulation of the various drama forms in order to "make all flowers bloom simultaneously and bring out the new from the old." With regard to music, we should continue to intensify the research into folk music and at the same time pay attention to the study and reform of opera music, ballad music and the national musical instruments. The art of dancing of the national minorities is rich and healthy. It should be widely studied and developed. As to painting, we should develop the right traditions of Chinese painting. The research into Chinese literary heritage is a very hard job. We should first of all study the history of modern and contemporary literature.

While we are proud of our heritage of national art and literature, we do not worship it blindly, but assume towards it a serious, scientific and critical attitude. We only absorb the democratic essence from the whole legacy and definitely scrape off the feudal dregs. We take the "democratic essence", accept it as the fine tradition

that it is, and develop it on a new basis. We do not regard the national culture as static, but as capable of developing, reforming itself and changing into the new in the course of practice. With regard to the problem of art, just as with regard to other problems we believe in development as opposed to stagnation. Our main task in our literary and art work is not to preserve the old national art and literature but to develop new national art and literature. Our comrades who devote themselves to drama reform should especially guard against the spread of feudal poison from all sides and should reform the reactionary feudal content of the old drama as well as the rotten backward form which is blended with that content. Only in this way can we fulfil our task of "bringing out the new from the old".

Once the problem of absorbing the fine traditions of our national art and literature is properly solved, our new art and literature will have a more penetrating development among the broad masses.

The present-day art and literature of China form a united front. They embrace the different thoughts and trends of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, but should be guided by proletarian ideology, Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's teachings. All the Communist and revolutionary workers of art and literature should endeavour to raise their level of understanding of Marxism-Leninism. This is a prerequisite for advancing the ideological, artistic, and militant qualities of art and literature. We should use the viewpoint and method of Marxism-Leninism, rather than any other viewpoint and method, to sweep away the ideological influences of imperialism and feudalism on the battlefront of art and literature. At the same time we should criticise the erroneous ideology of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. In particular we should thoroughly expose the bourgeois and petty bourgeois reactionary ideology disguised as Marxism-Leninism. The controversies about Wu Hsun and the film *The Life of Wu Hsun* reveal a serious aspect of our ideology as well as of our literary and art work. This shows that many of our comrades have become politically and ideologically insensitive under the new circumstances, have lost the ideological keenness inherent in a Communist, and have lost the power to criticise and distinguish a hostile and erroneous ideology. This state of affairs has something to do with the liberalist attitude existing among many literary and art workers. From the point of view of

responsibility of leadership it also has something to do with the "routinist" attitude existing among the leadership of our literary and art work.

We should overcome the routinist attitude in the leadership of literary and art work. Routinist leadership is leadership without any ideological principle. It pays no attention to the political and ideological angle, cares nothing about the activities of creative work and criticism, and has become used to the substitution of administrative method for fine and delicate ideological work.

We should overcome the liberalist attitude and vulgar habits existing among the literary and art workers. That such an attitude and such habits exist is proved by the fact that we do not criticise and fight against all erroneous ideologies, but are satisfied to exist peacefully side by side with it, and even echo it; that we do not relish criticism, but try to refute it on various pretexts; that in the mutual relations of literary and art workers we stress friendship and "face" and do not establish the correct relation according to a principle; that we vulgarise the serious ideological struggle.

The chief means to overcome these vicious attitudes is to carry on criticism and self-criticism in literary and art work. Literary criticism is an important weapon for putting into effect the teaching of the leadership of the Party. We should develop the political and ideological content of criticism and link it with the art analysis of practical works. Criticism should on the one hand fight against all deviations and on the other hand seek to discover new strength and new experiences in art and literature which should be encouraged and supported.

If we follow Mao Tse-tung's literary direction and work under the constant care and guidance of the Central Committee of the Party and Comrade Mao Tse-tung himself, the defects in our literary and art work can certainly be overcome. Let us overcome our defects and continue to advance steadily forward. Let us continue to struggle for the carrying out of Mao Tse-tung's literary line on the whole literary front.

Daughters and Sons

by KUNG CHUEH and YUAN CHING

The shaky scaffolding on which Chiang Kai-shek built his regime was rotted through with corruption and inefficiency. When the Japanese attacked North China in 1937, Chiang's army fled in confusion, leaving the people to their fate. The Chinese people, however, were not to be cowed by the treacherous desertion of the Kuomintang or the large-scale invasion of the Japanese. Under the leadership of the Communist Party they immediately took to arms to defend their homes and Fatherland. By 1945 they were so strong that they were in the position to throttle the enemy, thereby hastening the collapse of the Japanese Imperial Army. This novel, which is printed below without abridgement, tells the story of the hard struggles carried out by the best daughters and sons of China against a major imperialist force and its puppets on the vast North China plain. The authors, Kung Chueh and Yuan Ching, who are husband and wife and still in their thirties, worked for some time as low-ranking cadres with the heroes and heroines of this book. At present they are scenario writers in the Motion Picture Bureau, Peking.

Chapter I

Upheaval — Summer, 1937

In Shenjya village on the shore of Bayang Lake lived an elderly peasant and his two sons, Da-shwey who was twenty-one and Ru who was twelve. They owned less than an acre of wheat land and were heavily in debt to Shen, the mayor, who was the biggest landlord and the most active money lender in the village. Shen's clan, for generations, had been the local feudal lords, as

was indicated by the very name of the village, Shenjya, which means "Shen Family".

Dyeh * wanted Da-shwey to take a bride and was willing to borrow more money from Shen to finance the marriage. In those days, even a poor peasant felt socially obligated to stage an impressive wedding. In view of the fact that their financial status was already precarious, Da-shwey was more concerned about the marriage question than the news that the Japs were advancing on Peking, two hundred miles to the north.

"Things are bad enough as it is," he protested. "If we keep borrowing, we'll end up by losing our miserable little plot of ground too."

Driven by the traditional desire to carry on the paternal line, *Dyeh* insisted that they could assume the additional burden. Da-shwey didn't agree. He was powerfully built, with broad shoulders, brawny arms, and was a hard worker. He thought that if he would put his back to it, and labor day and night, they could get rid of the debt. Then he would feel free to marry.

While the family argument was raging, on July 7, 1937, the Japanese struck at the Marco Polo Bridge outside of Peking. A state of war between China and Japan was officially declared.

In Shenjya, acting on orders from the Kuomintang army, the police rounded up peasants to dig trenches. Da-shwey was among those conscripted. The police behaved in their usual brutal fashion and he was cracked on the head with a club several times during the month they spent digging.

The trenches turned out to be a waste of work. The Kuomintang army appeared briefly in the village during its rapid retreat, pausing only long enough to pillage and loot. The police force left next, as news arrived of the fall of one large town after another. Every day Jap planes, wheeling overhead, dropped bombs on the cities. The big officials, carrying their gold and silver money, departed for healthier climes, closely followed by the petty officials who took away as much as they could of whatever wasn't nailed down.

The villagers were beginning to become uneasy. One morning Da-shwey walked over to the village administration office to see whether he could learn any late news. He found a crowd of peasants standing around in the courtyard, all ears to a conversation between the mayor and some of the local gentry. The latter were so scared that they forgot their fancy speech affectations, and were arguing among themselves.

"Let's beat it! What's the use of sticking your neck out and waiting for the axe?"

"And leave all this property behind? I'm going to wait and see which way the wind blows! . . ."

Most people went around with their hearts in their mouths. They became even more frightened when a few days later, refugees from the fighting zones began pouring in — some crying, and all very upset.

Da-shwey, his father and his brother Ru were planting wheat on their little piece of leased land. They had no draft animals; the brothers pulled the seeder while their father guided it from behind. Since the seeder was heavy and Ru was little more than a child, Da-shwey did most of the pulling. Built like an ox, he dragged the seeder almost effortlessly.

* *Dyeh* is a familiar term for "father".

"At a time like this, you're planting wheat!" marveled one of the refugees. "Do you think you'll be here to eat it?"

Da-shwey stopped pulling and straightened his back. "He's right, we're probably planting for nothing," he said worriedly to his father. "We'd better leave."

Dyeh glared at him. "Where'll we run to? Get back to your pulling, boy. If we die, then there's no problem. If we live, we've still got to eat!"

Da-shwey had an elder cousin named Blacky Tsay who also lived in Shenjya with his wife and child. Blacky hadn't been home for many months. He was secretly a member of the Communist Party, and was called "Blacky" because of his dark ruddy complexion. Originally a blacksmith, he had opened a small restaurant as a front and helped revolutionaries move about from one part of the region to another. Then the police put on a "Communist eradication" campaign. Things got too hot for him and he had to leave. His wife supported herself and the child by weaving mats and baskets.

The refugees kept coming in ever increasing numbers, and found living quarters wherever they could. Mrs. Blacky Tsay was one of the many villagers in Shenjya required to put up friends or relatives running from the Jap scourge. Her mother, Mrs. Yang, and her younger sister, Mey, appeared at her door one afternoon. They had fled from their home town which was already occupied by the Japs. It was only fifty miles west of Shenjya.

"What shall we do?" said Mrs. Yang in despair. "Bandits and deserters are everywhere. . . . Where can I go with this girl to get away from all this trouble? She's grown up, and should be married by now. I've thought and thought, but I don't see any way out. . . ."

A few days later, Mrs. Tsay approached *Dyeh* about making a match between Da-shwey and her sister. Father was delighted.

"That's wonderful!" he smiled. "We don't have much money now, but if your mother will consent . . ."

"Who wants to get married in these unsettled times," Da-shwey mumbled manfully, but his heart pounded queerly.

In the past, Mey often came to Shenjya to visit her elder sister. Da-shwey had met her there and talked with her several times. She was a very pretty girl, a capable house-keeper with a pleasant disposition. Once Da-shwey went to ask Mrs. Tsay to do some mending for him. She was out, but Mey, who was visiting at the time, did the job neatly and quickly, without a word.

Mey is a fine girl, thought Da-shwey that day. I certainly would be happy, if married to her. . . .

His cousin's wife, Mrs. Tsay, knew how he felt. Now that she had his father's consent, she returned home to talk it over with her mother.

Mey was sitting on the *kang*, busy with needle and thread. She was seventeen, slim, but quite strong. She could carry a full bucket of water a long way without having to set it down. Her mother was old-fashioned and made her wear a long thick braid and bangs. As her sister and mother talked, Mey raised her big eyes for a moment. She saw her sister smiling in her direction, and guessed that they were discussing her prospective marriage. She began to blush furiously. Keeping her head down as if intent on her work, she listened closely to what was being said.

Da-shwey is a fine boy — honest and sweet, she thought. If I can marry a good-hearted peasant like him, I'll be content all my life. . . .

To her surprise and disappointment, her mother couldn't make up her mind. Da-shwey's family was so poor . . . "There's no rush about this," said Mrs. Yang finally. "We'll talk it over again later."

It soon became apparent that Mrs. Tsay couldn't afford to take care of her two guests. Mey and her mother moved to the home of another relative in a nearby village. The marriage question was held in abeyance.

*

In the fall, the bandits got busy, and every village was menaced by them. The gangs would force the villages to give them official status, and, posing as their "protectors", constantly made levies for "upkeep".

In Shenjya, there was a small operator named Lyew who had one gun and five men. One day he went to Shen, the mayor, and asked, "What about it? All the other villages have organized. Unless we do the same, I can't promise to give protection."

Lyew was well known as a local tough. The mayor's private gang having run off, he had no choice but to consent. That afternoon, the villagers were summoned to meet in the temple courtyard. Da-shwey and his father attended. His pistol stuck in his belt, Lyew got up on the steps and addressed the gathering. He used new terms he had recently heard but about whose meaning he was more than a little vague.

"It's like this," he said. "Every village has a protection group, and we've got to have one too — paid for by the village. These days we've all got to work together and share everything with one another. This is called 'communism'."

He stepped down, pulled out a pack of cigarettes, and began handing them out. "Let's communize!" he said grandly.

Cooking facilities and sleeping quarters for the gang were promptly set up in the temple.

Dyeh angrily tugged Da-shwey's arm. "Let's go home to work — these people are all blind!"

Later that afternoon, Syow, a young peasant neighbor, asked Da-shwey to join the band with him. Da-shwey shook his head.

"No one in my family was ever mixed up in that kind of dirty business," he said.

In the nearby village of Hojwang, another gang of bandits was formed. It was headed by one Ho, a big landlord owning about 750 acres of land. He was a member of the Kuomintang Party and had been a staff officer in the Kuomintang army. Jinlung, a shrewd, cruel young man, was Ho's overseer and a ranking officer in the "Hojwang Company". The gang, which was quite large, had a considerable number of guns and was full of army deserters and former police. Lyew, knowing his crew could never stand up to the Hojwang crowd, joined forces with it.

Ho's enlarged gang roved from one village to the next, commandeering food. Their demands usually were in terms of 1,000 lbs. — whether meat or wheat, oil or vinegar. The peasants were very hard pressed. In addition, the gang would make levies of money on the entire village.

Meanwhile the Japs were moving south along the railroad to the west. Because this was quite far from the Bayang villages, one could still draw a breath.

One afternoon Da-shwey sat with his father in a little boat, while his brother Ru did the rowing. After traveling about half a mile, they came out of the inlet into Bayang Lake. In the clear shallow water along the shore there was a dense growth of reeds. They stepped out of their boat and wielded their gleaming sickles.

Oblivious to the cries of the water fowl startled by their presence, they worked steadily. Overhead, a hawk was slowly circling. Da-shwey wondered whether he and Mey could ever get married. He had no way of knowing that, against her will, her mother had already engaged her to someone else, and set the date for the wedding. The lucky man was the overseer, now turned bandit, Jinlung!

The sun was almost set; its scarlet reflection on the surface of the water dazzled the eyes. Heavily laden with reeds, the boat moved sluggishly back in the direction of the dyke, with the two brothers straining at the oars. By the time they unloaded the cargo on to the shore, it was dark and the moon had reached the tree-tops.

The following morning, Da-shwey and *Dyeh* turned most of their reeds over to Shen to meet an interest payment. A few hours later, Ho's bandits imposed a fresh levy which wiped out the small surplus of reeds left.

The next day, Jinlung, a pistol strapped round his waist, came riding toward Shenjya on a big mule. On the road he saw Da-shwey picking manure with a wooden bucket and shovel. Reining to a stop, he cocked his head to one side and flashed a couple of gold teeth in greeting.

"Hey, stupid — what are you doing that for?" he called. "Come in with us and eat white rolls and stewed pork!"

Da-shwey knew what kind of man Jinlung was. He broke into a nervous sweat. "I'm no good at that sort of thing," he replied confusedly.

"What! You mean you don't know how to eat white rolls and stewed pork?" mocked Jinlung coldly.

Da-shwey couldn't think of anything to say. He continued slowly along the road with his head down, scooping up manure and putting it into his bucket.

Jinlung watched him scornfully. "You weren't made right, you've got your eyes in your arse!" he hooted. He kicked up his mule, swung his crop and galloped off.

Da-shwey glared after him until he disappeared.

*

In October, the Communist Army forces under General Lu camped a few miles from Shenjya. One of Da-shwey's neighbors had seen them on his way back from a market town where he had gone to buy cloth. He couldn't praise them enough — how different they were from the "guzzle-and-swill soldiers", as he described the bandits. He told how they wore rough cloth uniforms, ate millet, fought the Japs, looked after the peasants and cleaned up the bandits.

"That's what I call a real army!" he said, sticking up a thumb from a clenched fist. "Join them, if you want to fight the Japs! Anybody who joins the guzzle-and-swill soldiers is crazy!"

The same kind of reports came from all over. Immediately, dozens of young men wanted to enlist in the "Ba Lu", as the Communist "Eighth Route" Army was then called (the term was also used synonymously for Communists generally). The "Hojwang Company", afraid the Ba Lu would wipe it out, hastily decided to call itself a "self defense corps". It was joined by another Kuomintang member, a former army captain named Gwo, who had deserted during the mass exodus of Chiang Kai-shek's men. Ho recognized him as one of his own kind and dignified him with the title of "vice regimental commander". The two worked well together. They ruled the region as if it were their own small kingdom.

By now, Da-shwey was weary of waiting for news about his marriage. While Mrs. Tsay didn't have the courage to tell him the truth, since such a long time had already expired, he guessed that there was no hope. At home, economic conditions were going from bad to worse. Half the time they didn't have enough to eat. Da-shwey felt depressed and resentful.

"This is the limit!" he said to his father. "We're practically starving. We'd be better off if I joined the Ba Lu."

"You're out of your mind! Don't get mixed up in things that don't concern you. Tomorrow, I'll check up on your marriage arrangements."

"I'm never going to get married! I'll be a monk with hair! I want to join the army!"

"I told you you can't go," yelled *Dyeh*, angrily rapping him on the head with his long pipe, "you insist on talking about it — you insist!"

Da-shwey scowled and rolled over on the *kang*. Covering his head with the quilt, he went to sleep.

The following morning, Da-shwey's cousin Blacky Tsay, unexpectedly returned to Shenjya. He was healthy and in fine spirits, though his clothes were a mass of patches. On seeing Da-shwey again, his bristly mustache twisted into a grin. The two chatted animatedly and with great affection.

Friends and neighbors, hearing that Blacky had come home, began dropping in. He was known to be a straightforward, honest man, and people liked being with him and talking with him. His two-room house was soon crowded with visitors.

This was the period of "Kuomintang-Communist Cooperation", and Blacky Tsay no longer had to hide. He told his friends the war news and of the new ideals that were sweeping the country — "Defeat Japanese Imperialism", "Mobilize the Whole Nation", "Improve the People's Livelihood" . . . The peasants savored these new phrases with interest.

Da-shwey remained after everyone else had left. His cousin looked at him intently.

"Are you willing to be a slave in a defeated country?" Blacky suddenly asked.

"No one wants that," said Da-shwey. "Didn't you just get through telling us how terrible that would be?"

"Good!" said Blacky softly. "Work with me. We'll form a militia. When the Japs come, we'll fight them!"

Da-shwey had heard his cousin talk for over an hour, but there were still some things he couldn't believe.

"How can we beat them empty-handed?" he asked.

Blacky Tsay laughed. "We don't have to worry that there are thousands of Japs. The only thing to fear is that the people won't rise against them soon enough. Once the people are aroused, we can't lose! We have arms. Tomorrow help me move some here — what do you say?"

Da-shwey was flabbergasted. "All right . . .," he stammered, "but tomorrow I've got some work to do. . . ."

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Blacky smiled. "We'll go together. No one will pay any attention to two cousins going out for a walk. I guarantee that nothing will happen."

Da-shwey hesitated. "I'll have to ask my father," he said evasively.

His cousin shook his head and clapped Da-shwey on the shoulder. "Old brother, don't talk to him about this. I don't want to take any chances of this leaking out." He leaned over and whispered his plan into Da-shwey's ear.

Da-shwey thought a moment. "Fine, let's do it that way," he laughed. After receiving a few more words of final instruction, he returned home.

The following day, the two men set out, each carrying a shoulder pole with two large empty wicker fish baskets — one on each end. To anyone who asked where they were heading, Blacky replied casually that they were going to buy fish to resell at retail.

Once outside the village, they followed the dyke a distance, then cut over to the west. At dusk, they reached the village of Fu Hsi on the Fu River. An old lady opened the door of a small house in response to their knock. She peered at them in the light of an oil lamp which she carried in her hand.

"I've come for the things," Blacky said in a low voice.

The white-haired lady led them to an inner courtyard. There she pulled out a big burlap bag from its hiding place in a stack of grain stalks and opened it. It was full of hand grenades — about three hundred of them — all sizes. The men filled the four baskets and covered them tightly with lotus leaves. The old lady gave them some water and corn muffins while Blacky talked with her quietly for a few minutes. Then they lifted their carrying poles on to their shoulders and started back through the night.

"Who gave us so many bombs?" Da-shwey asked in a whisper, as they strode swiftly along the dark road.

"They're hand grenades, and nobody gave them to us," laughed his cousin. "We gathered them. When the Kuomintang army ran away, they left behind great quantities of munitions. Most of the rifles and pistols we collected we turned over to General Lu. We'll do fine with these few hand grenades — you'll see!"

It was almost dawn when they arrived back at the village. They went directly to the school which hadn't been used since the Jap attack at Marco Polo Bridge. Shwang the weaver, who worked a tiny plot of ground in his spare time, was waiting for them in the school yard. The skinny little fellow was extremely dexterous. He had already dug two deep holes in the earthen floor of one of the class rooms. Working quietly, the three men began burying the grenades. They finished as the cocks started to crow.

*

During the next few days, Blacky Tsay organized about a dozen men. Meeting every night in the abandoned school, they decided upon the name of "Anti-Japanese Militia". At the same time, they let it be known that General

Lu had ordered the formation of such bands and had issued powerful Mauser pistols to them. They spread the word that they would settle with anyone who opposed fighting the Japs.

Da-shwey worked during the day and ran around with his cousin at night. He was pleased and fascinated by the new world which Blacky was opening to him.

"What craziness are you up to?" *Dyeh* asked him one day.

"Resisting the Japs!"

"Today you can't see hair nor hide of a couple of hundred thousand Kuomintang troops who tried to resist them. What have a handful of men like you got that'll lick 'em?"

"Is it better not to try and just knuckle under?"

Dyeh had no answer; Da-shwey followed up his advantage. "If you won't let me do this, I'll join the army."

"People will pull you by your nose! Anyhow, I can't control you. Do what you please!" *Dyeh* surrendered grumpily.

Mayor Shen suspected that Blacky Tsay was a Communist and it worried him considerably. By then, a few of his former personal gang had drifted back and that stiffened his spine. His first impulse was to crush Tsay's group immediately. But when he heard that they had guns, he decided to send Gulu, one of his old gang, to do a bit of spying first.

That night, Gulu was spotted by the man on sentry duty as he sneaked up to the abandoned school. Twur, the sentry, a great hulk of a young fellow, was hiding in the shadows.

"Who's there? — answer at once or I fire!" he roared.

Gulu thought Twur really had a gun and was scared speechless, but he didn't dare to run. Twur grabbed him and dragged him in before Blacky Tsay. Gulu was terrified.

"Mr. Tsay . . . Master Tsay — don't shoot me!" he quavered. "I was ordered to do this . . . I had no choice . . . I had to do it!"

But when Blacky asked him some questions in an amiable manner, he gave answers which everyone knew were lies. Blacky became angry and threatened him. Gulu began trembling again. Rolling his eyes, he spilled the whole story of Shen's instructions.

Blacky burst into uproarious laughter.

"We've got plenty of pistols and hand grenades," he said, pointing at two large box seats. "Go back and tell that to Mr. Shen. Tell him if he plays square, we'll welcome his joining us to fight the Japs — but if he tries any more stuff behind our backs, we're going to fix him!"

Gulu fervently promised to so report; he left hastily.

The next afternoon, the militia marched forth. Every man was laden with hand grenades hung round his waist. In addition, each one of them had wrapped cloth around a whisk broom and strapped it on his hip. Under their jackets, the brooms bulged impressively like pistols. Some of the men had old fowling pieces slung across their backs. They strode down the street in formation, singing *The Volunteers' March:*

Arise,
Ye who refuse to be slaves!

Build a new Great Wall
With our flesh and blood . . .

Da-shwey was afraid it would be discovered that the pistols were fakes. He kept turning his head and surreptitiously patting his whisk broom to make sure it was still there. In this fashion, the militia made several turns through the village streets. When they got to the village administration office and poured in through the door, they loomed large and ominous in the little room.

Mayor Shen was wearing a rich blue tunic, with a gold watch chain looped through one of the button holes. He was frightened out of his usual haughty manner when the crowd surged in. Paling, he quickly doffed his satin mandarin hat. After bowing Blacky Tsay to a chair, he ordered Gulu to pour tea and offer cigarettes.

"Don't bother," said Blacky, coming right to the point. "Now the Kuomintang and Communists are cooperating against the Japs. Where do you stand?"

Mayor Shen stroked his mustache. "Of course the country comes first. I have always advocated resisting the Japanese," he said smoothly.

"That's fine," said Blacky Tsay, "Since we're all against the Japs — one family, so to speak — I suggest that your village 'protection corps' merge with our militia for the sake of efficiency. What do you think?"

This was the last thing Shen wanted, but he didn't know how to put it. He pretended a vigorous fit of coughing.

"What about it?" Blacky pressed him.

"Well . . . It's a good idea . . . ," the mayor was extremely uncomfortable, "but . . . I haven't the authority to make the final decision. . . . Let's talk about it again some other time."

Blacky could see that Shen was being deliberately evasive, and was about to say something more pointed when a peasant rushed in to announce that armed bandits were raiding the next village. Mayor Shen exchanged glances with the members of his "protection corps", but made no move.

Blacky Tsay stood up. "Let's go take a look!"

"That's their affair," stalled the mayor. "We don't have to bother."

"Not bother?" said Blacky incredulously. "If we don't protect the people, what good are we? What do we carry guns for? If you're afraid, stay home — We're going!"

"Let's all go together," said the mayor, reddening with embarrassment.

With Blacky Tsay leading the militia and the mayor following behind with the "protection corps", the group set out along the dyke toward the beleaguered village.

As they trotted steadily, Da-shwey was in a turmoil. He could feel the whisk broom jouncing on his hip. Now we're in for it! he thought. The whisk brooms were a good trick for scaring people, but if we really have to fight, we're going to make a mess of it!

He looked at the grenades strung around his waist, then tugged at the arm of Twur who was running next to him.

"How do you work the hand grenades?" he whispered.

"I don't know," said Twur, "I've never tried."

"That's great!" Da-shwey said to himself sarcastically. Though a stiff breeze was blowing from the west, his body was soaked with perspiration. But he noticed that Blacky, calm as ever, was moving forward with square shoulders and in great strides.

When they reached their destination, the bandits were nowhere to be seen.

Mayor Shen stood high on a mound on the top of the dyke. "It's fortunate we didn't catch them," he said, carelessly stroking his mustache. "Your grenades probably wouldn't go off."

Blacky Tsay's eyes flashed. "Wouldn't go off? Watch!"

He pulled the pin from a grenade and flung it far into the empty field. It exploded with an ear-splitting sound, as earth shot heavenward and birds flew madly in confused haste. Dropping to his knees in terror, the mayor crawled behind the mound on which he had been standing. He paid no attention to how this was dirtying his beautiful clothes.

"You shouldn't play with those things!" he said reproachfully, while the militia shouted approval.

"Here's one for me!" cried Twur, rolling up his sleeve and letting go another grenade.

It went off like a clap of thunder. Shen who had just gotten up, dropped on his belly again.

"Stop it! Stop it!" he bawled. "I'm convinced! You're liable to hurt someone!"

Shwang, clowning, batted his eyes with an effort and waved a grenade over his head.

"No, no," he protested. "I still haven't thrown mine. Look out, everybody!"

Shen staggered to his feet and grabbed Shwang's arm. "Enough — please!" he begged. "Stop fooling around!"

Shwang made a wry face, as if very disappointed. The men all laughed.

"Whatever you do, don't fire your pistol!" said Twur, warningly patting Da-shwey's shoulder.

Da-shwey felt his whisk broom, and couldn't help grinning.

It was dusk when they reached their own village.

That evening, Blacky Tsay sent a man to invite the mayor to come and discuss the merging of forces. The mayor begged off, but sent his secretary to say that it was agreeable. Blacky then stipulated the following conditions: Shen would continue to act as mayor, but his fighting men would come under Tsay's command. Both factions would join in a united front against the Japs and mobilize the village. The rich would be asked to contribute money; the strong to contribute labor. Anyone who had a store of arms — for instance, the mayor — would donate them for the fight against the Japs.

After hearing his secretary's report, the mayor couldn't sleep all night.

The next day Blacky Tsay and his men called on him again and he agreed to everything. The two groups became one. Some of Shen's men resigned, but all guns were turned in and redistributed. The pistol of the former chief of Shen's personal gang now rested on the hip of Blacky Tsay. All guns which rich landlords in Shenjya and in several neighboring villages had cached were unearthed and assigned to the men of the militia. Funds were raised to buy additional weapons. Both the armaments and the membership of the militia were increased.

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When news of the activities of the militia reached the village of Hojwang, Ho decided he had better do something. He dispatched Gwo, Jinlung and Lyew with a group of men to make a surprise raid on Shenjya. Bursting into the administration office, they demanded 1,000 lbs. of cake made of flour and eggs. The mayor knew this was only an excuse to make trouble as soon as he heard it. He said he'd be right back and went directly to Blacky Tsay.

"Where will we get so much cake? I don't know what to do. Please, you handle them," begged the mayor.

Grimly, Tsay called Da-shwey and Twur, and the three of them returned with the mayor to the office. They found Gwo big as life seated in the mayor's chair. He was wearing his Kuomintang uniform in full insignia and sporting a Sam Browne belt. Standing by his side was Jinlung in a dark civilian suit, his hat pushed to the back of his sleekly combed hair, two pistols stuck in his belt. The rest of the gang lounged around in various garb. They all were armed, nasty-eyed characters.

Gwo guessed that the dark, full-bearded man followed by the two country bumpkins was Blacky Tsay.

"Are you Tsay the blacksmith?" he asked, deliberately contemptuous.

Blacky put his right foot up on a little bench and rested his elbow on his knee.

"I am blacksmith Tsay. What's it to you?" he replied casually.

"What's it to me, eh? I'm ordering you and this village to deliver 1,000 lbs. of cake, immediately!"

"We haven't even got chaff muffins here, and you want cake!" retorted Blacky with a cold laugh.

"We have a slight temperature," said bandit Lyew significantly, "and must eat cakes!"

"It's a good idea, if you can work it," said Twur.

"Where are you going to find cake in a poor village like this?" ventured Da-shwey, gathering his courage. "We don't even have a pastry shop."

Gwo's face darkened. "We're wasting time. Will you or won't you deliver?"

By now, the militia which Shwang had called reached the scene. They stood listening in the courtyard with a group of peasants. Shwang's peppery temper exploded.

"What do you say — do we have cakes for these guys?"

"No!" roared the crowd.

Gwo's pock-marked face turned a fiery red. "Who's making that row?" he said ominously. "This is an order from our Brigade Commander. If you refuse to deliver, you'll have to come with me and tell it to him!"

At his signal, his men cocked their pistols and snapped off the safeties.

Twur quickly moved the bolt of his rifle. The militiamen crowded in from the courtyard, opening their safeties. Da-shwey's heart beat rapidly. Mayor Shen slipped out the door and ran.

Suddenly, Blacky straightened up and lifted his hand. He winked to his men.

"All right. Those who want to eat cake, come with me!" he said.

"You, Tsay! Don't try to pull anything!" scowled Jinlung suspiciously.

Blacky raised his head high. "You have a commander. We also have a commander. If you want cake, come with me to General Lu and eat it there!"

"That's right," put in Twur. "He's got plenty of cake!"

The peasants in the courtyard took up the cry.

"Go to General Lu! Go to General Lu!"

Gwo's eyes bulged like a bull's balls. He pounded the table in front of Blacky Tsay.

"The hell with all this farting!" he howled. "I don't recognize any General Lu! Tie this smart aleck up".

Several bandits moved toward Blacky. He raised his pistol and took a step in their direction.

"Who's the first to try!" he challenged.

Shwang and the militia leveled their guns. Some unhooked their hand grenades.

All paused at the sound of horses' hoof beats approaching.

Three men dressed in grey uniforms of coarse cloth rode up. Dismounting, they entered the courtyard.

"Where can I find leader Tsay?" the first one asked.

"He's in there," a peasant replied, pointing to the mayor's office.

The man bounded into the room. He walked up to Tsay and began pumping his hand.

Blacky Tsay beamed. "When did you get here?"

"The main force is back a distance. We've come first to see you!"

"Fine, fine! Let's go into the next room and talk." With the militia eagerly crowding around the soldiers, they moved into the west wing.

Gwo stood there with his mouth hanging open stupidly. Jinlung nudged him.

"Let's go!"

"It's getting late now," said Gwo in a forced voice. "We'll come again tomorrow."

"We'll come for the cake tomorrow," echoed Lyew.

The bandits beat a hasty retreat.

The soldiers whose arrival was so timely were members of a company of General Lu's army which had come to Bayang Lake.

After the company set up, it organized local defenses and made a special point of cleaning out the bandits. Ho was ordered to either join the war of resistance against the Japs and take orders or turn in his weapons. There was no way out. Ho said he'd take orders.

*

In December, Blacky Tsay sent Da-shwey to the village of Hojwang to buy gun powder. Da-shwey was walking down the main street, when he heard the noise of firing, mingled with the sound of music. People lined both sides of the road and Da-shwey was crowded back up on somebody's front steps. Down the road came Lyew carrying a double-barreled shot gun, roughly shoving left and right to make way. He was followed by six musicians blowing for all they were worth. In back of them was a blue sedan chair. Behind it was a bride's red sedan chair, covered with red satin and gold filigree. A group of men wearing pistols brought up the rear. The impressive procession walked slowly by.

Who's putting on all this pomp? wondered Da-shwey. His inquiries revealed that Jinlung was getting married and that the bride's maiden name was Yang. Da-shwey's heart contracted.

"Is her given name Mey?"

"That's right. Do you know her?"

Da-shwey numbly watched the bridal sedan chair move out of sight.

At that same moment, Mey, bathed in tears, sat swaying in the sedan chair. She had long since heard that Jinlung was no good. For the past two days she lay on the *kang* pretending to be sick. She covered her head with the bedding and cried incessantly, while her mother urged her and pleaded with her. Worn out when the bridal chair arrived, she was vaguely aware of being helped into it.

Chapter II

The Communists — December 1937 - 1938

For the first three days after her marriage, Mey was well treated. As was customary, she lived with her husband's family. The fourth day, her mother-in-law asked her to demonstrate her sewing ability. This, too, was customary. In their region the demonstration consisted of making a pair of cotton-padded trousers for the mother-in-law. When the job was finished, mother-in-law microscopically examined the trousers. She shook her head disapprovingly. Here the stitches were too big; there the padding was uneven; she expressed her dissatisfaction sharply.

By the time a year had gone by, they had shoved off all the household chores on to Mey. Every day she ground the wheat, cooked the meals, slivered reeds, and wove over ten feet of reed matting!

Her in-laws at one time had money, but it had been dissipated away by Jinlung's father. All they had left was the wreck of a formerly fine house and garden. The family depended on Jinlung's ability to swindle someone out of a few dollars occasionally. With this money, they would eat well and dress well for a while putting on a show of keeping up appearances. Mey never shared in these brief spells of prosperity. They looked down on her as a "yokel".

Once her father-in-law, feeling rather mellow after a session with his opium pipe, gave her a corn muffin. Just then her mother-in-law came in.

"Dear girl, have you grown two stomachs?" she inquired sweetly.

"I figure feed her full once in a while and she can work harder," explained her father-in-law.

Her mother-in-law sniffed, but said nothing. Mey lost her appetite. She put the corn muffin back in the basket and went out to the grist mill. This slim little girl now had her hair done up with a bun in the back like a middle-

aged woman. Wearing an over-sized padded robe, she pushed the heavy roller around the grist mill, as tears ran down her cheeks.

Her mother-in-law watched her like a hawk. Everything in the house was kept under lock and key. Before each meal, her mother-in-law would unlock the bins containing the flour and millet, and, personally, dole out exactly the amount required for that meal. Mey felt depressed beyond endurance, but there was no one she could turn to. Her husband was a surly brute who wore a perpetual frown on his face. The two had nothing to say to one another. Mey's mother had returned to their home town, which was a good distance away. Her only respite was during her visits to her sister in Shenjya where she could cry openly. Da-shwey heard about her miserable life and was sick at heart. But since she was a married woman now, there was nothing he could do to help her.

*

In December, 1937, the Japs attacked. The newly formed Communist forces fought them for three days and three nights on the banks of the Fu River and drove them back. In the spring of 1938, the enemy attacked again, with over 1,000 men, horse-drawn artillery and planes. The Communists only had about 300 men in the regular army, but held the Japs for a day at the river. Then the Japs broke through and captured the walled city that was the county seat. The Ba Lu Army took to the countryside. It cooperated with the local Communist cells and continued organizing the people and increasing armaments.

Members of the propaganda teams often came to Shenjya. There were also Red Army Women Auxiliaries in their blue uniforms. They would paste up posters and make speeches in the streets. On her visits to her sister, Mey sometimes would go with her to meetings, where she enviously observed these Women Auxiliaries. Imagine their knowing how to speak before an audience — and to write! They weren't oppressed by anyone either!

Once in a while she saw Da-shwey cheerfully striding down the street. His head was bound with a small white towel, a rifle hung across his back.

Even young Ru had joined the people's movement. He was in the Youth Auxiliary whose members sang songs, drilled, and made themselves generally useful.

Mey had no chance to participate, since the longest she ever stayed in Shenjya was three days. Her mother-in-law never allowed her to stay there longer.

In the fall, Peasants' Unions were organized. Blacky Tsay was in charge of them in several villages and was away from Shenjya most of the time. Da-shwey became a "cadre", as workers in government organs and people's organizations are called, in the Union in Shenjya. Mayor Shen made scornful remarks about him behind his back.

"Hmph! What can a bunch of empty-headed illiterates like him accomplish!" he scoffed.

When the rent and interest reduction program was launched, Shen became still more dissatisfied and secretly did everything in his power to obstruct it. But when several hundred members of the Peasants' Union complained about him to the county government, he decided to behave himself. Much to Da-shwey's

relief he would now greet Da-shwey effusively when they met.

Dyeh figured out that the compound interest he had owed Shen had grown to the size of the original loan. If it hadn't been for the rent and interest reduction law which provided that any uncollected rents or interest above the fixed maximum were illegal, he would have lost his land. Now for the first time, father and sons could eat decently.

"Thanks to the Peasants' Union," *Dyeh* said to Da-shwey, "the landlord no longer has us by the throat. Keep up the good work!"

Da-shwey went at it more enthusiastically than ever.

*

Shwang thought a hard worker like Da-shwey should be invited to join the Communist Party. One day at noon he called on him to sound him out.

"Are you busy? Let's gather some fuel stalks," Shwang suggested.

Da-shwey took his small sickle and some cord, and the two left the village.

In the fields, after cutting for a while, they came to a growth of high reeds. Shwang, noting that they were alone, queried Da-shwey as they chopped.

"Do you think we'll be able to lick the Japs?"

"Sure."

"Are you afraid of them?"

"What's there to be afraid of!"

"Da-shwey, who do you think is leading us against the Japs?"

This fellow is queer, thought Da-shwey. Why is he asking me all these questions? Still, he replied with conviction, "Blacky Tsay, of course."

Shwang laughed. "Do you know who Blacky Tsay is?"

Da-shwey looked at him blankly. "Why, he's my cousin!"

The guy is hopeless! thought Shwang impatiently. They continued cutting in silence. Several minutes later, Shwang tried again.

"Da-shwey, in the future, when Communism is put into practice, do you think it will be a good thing?"

"I don't know . . . What if they communize my land? I've only got less than an acre. . . ."

Shwang straightened his back and shook his sickle furiously.

"You dummy! Why would anybody want to divide up your little plot!" He glared at Da-shwey, who was still mechanically swinging his sickle. "Quit cutting, we're going back!"

They shouldered the bundles of fuel stalks, and wordlessly returned to the village.

Da-shwey couldn't figure it out. He wondered what was on Shwang's mind.

One evening it was Twur's turn to stand guard. He asked Da-shwey to keep him company. Taking his rifle, Da-shwey went with Twur to his post on the road leading to the village.

After seating themselves on a stack of stalks and chatting idly for a while, Twur said, "You're a fine fellow, but you're kind of slow. Has anyone asked you to join?"

Da-shwey still wasn't clear. "Join what?"

"You just won't speak out!" fumed Twur. "Didn't Shwang talk to you?"

"He didn't say anything special," replied Da-shwey.

What am I going to do with this dunce! thought Twur, exasperated. He's Shwang's "candidate", and no one asked me to talk to him . . . but I ought to do something!

Suddenly, the light dawned on Da-shwey. "You mean join the Communist Party!" he shouted.

Twur grabbed him. "What are you hollering about? Do you want everyone to hear you?"

"Twur," Da-shwey whispered, "If I join the Party, will I still be able to tend my field?"

"Naturally. If the farmers don't plant, how are we going to eat?"

"Then I'll join. Are you a member? How do you go about it?"

"I . . . ," Twur wanted to tell him, but knew he shouldn't. "Let's try to find out," he said vaguely. "If I hear, I'll tell you; if you hear, you tell me. All right?"

"Good," said Da-shwey.

When Twur's sentry duty was over, Da-shwey walked back with him to the village. "If you find out how to join the Party, don't forget about me!" Da-shwey, whispering, reminded him.

Twur smiled in agreement, and they parted.

For the next half month Da-shwey anxiously kept waiting for news, but Twur didn't open the subject again. Da-shwey couldn't bring himself to ask, though the question was rankling him. He noticed that if he came upon Shwang talking to certain peasants, obviously about something important, the minute he appeared they would send him off on an errand elsewhere. He imagined he was being left out of things and felt very hurt.

Then one night Shwang summoned the militia. Their mission was to cut communications and dig ditches across the main highway in Jap controlled territory to the west. When they reached the highway, Shwang posted sentries, then split the rest of the men into work teams. They competed with one another to show who could dig the most and the fastest. In spite of the cold weather, Da-shwey removed his overcoat and rolled up his sleeves. He swung his pickax powerfully and deep; none of the others could keep up with him. His section of the road was soon ribbed with a ten foot wide trench.

When they returned, Da-shwey carried a telephone pole with a considerable length of wire rolled around the end of it. Shwang trudged beside him, a pick and shovel over his shoulder and a coil of wire around his waist. They walked slowly, lagging behind the rest of the men. Half way home, they set down their trophies and rested.

The bright moonlight cast grotesque shadows of the squatting men. Da-shwey lit his pipe. Shwang was dripping perspiration.

"My poor back," he moaned comically. "That load was squeezing me dry!"

"This will make plenty of firewood," said Da-shwey, patting the telephone pole affectionately. "When we get it chopped up, we'll boil you all the water you can drink!"

"Da-shwey, when you do something, you go all out! You're a good man."

"But you fellows don't think I'm good enough," replied Da-shwey sadly. "If you did, you'd let me join the Communist Party."

"Are you sure you know the work of the Party?" smiled Shwang.

"Sure I know — it fights the Japs!"

"What else?"

"It leads our rent reduction program and sees to it that we poor people don't go hungry."

"Right," said Shwang with a laugh. "The Communist Party wants everyone to have clothes to wear, food to eat, books to read, and to have a full life."

"I believe with my whole heart that the Communist Party is right and good," said Da-shwey simply. He passed his pipe over to Shwang.

Shwang took a couple of puffs, then asked, "Who do you think is a Communist in our village?"

"That's like asking me whether I know my own brother. For one, I'm sure you are!"

Shwang laughed, but didn't answer. Da-shwey grasped his arm.

"Don't keep me in suspense like this!" he said urgently. "I want to learn from you men, work with you, because I know you're doing fine things!"

"The Communist Party thinks the world of workers and farmers like us. There's no question about your being welcome. As a matter of fact, a meeting has already been held, approving you as a member."

"I'm really a member?" cried Da-shwey, leaping to his feet in excitement.

"Not so loud! Membership must be kept a strict secret. Even parents and wives can't be told."

Da-shwey promised to be discreet. When he got home, he glowed as if he had just found a fortune.

The next day, at a meeting of the village Communists, Da-shwey was warmly welcomed to the ranks of the Party.

*

After the meeting Da-shwey went back to the farm. His father told him that Mey had been beaten and was staying with her sister. The old man shook his head.

"The gods must have been napping to let a nice girl like that fall into the hands of those people," he sighed.

"They've got money!" said Da-shwey angrily.

"She's always been very good to us. Why don't you go to see her?" suggested his younger brother, Ru.

"No! Leave things as they are!" retorted Da-shwey. But after smoking a pipe, he found himself walking to Blacky's house.

When he entered, Mey was helping her sister wash the dinner dishes. Her back was toward him. In the light of the oil lamp, he couldn't see any marks of beating.

"My mother was blind to marry the girl into such a family!" said Mrs. Tsay bitterly. "They curse her and beat her. This time, her mother-in-law forgot where she hid the matches. Mey spent her own money to buy another box. Her mother-in-law accused her of stealing them and made her eat some! Then she took a stick and beat her over the head and face! Look!" She took Mey by the arm. "Let Da-shwey see."

Mey shook off her sister's grasp and whirled away. Covering her face with her hands she burst into tears.

"Her head is a mass of cuts," sighed Mrs. Tsay, "and she has a big swelling on her forehead. They almost put her eye out!"

"Mother's * — ! Those people are poison!" seethed Da-shwey with a lump in his throat.

"If they treat her like this only after one year of marriage, what will it be like later on!" said Mrs. Tsay.

"Anyhow, I'm not going back!" said Mey, raising her head defiantly.

"Ai! If you don't go back, what'll you do?"

"I'll join the Red Army Women's Auxiliary!"

"Don't be silly! You can't read, why should they want you?"

"That's all right," Da-shwey quickly interposed. "They have some women in the organization who can't read either!"

Mrs. Tsay's baby, wanting to sleep, began to cry crankily; Da-shwey left.

The next day Jinlung came with another man and bodily carried Mey off. Da-shwey was very worried about her, but he thought to himself: If I start asking questions about her, people will think there's something between us, and that'll make it worse.

He let the matter rest.

Several days later, Da-shwey was ordered to the county training school for cadres. In the old days, a farm boy never got any kind of training from the government except military.

"Isn't this training business going to make you a soldier?" *Dyeh* questioned him. "Why don't we ask your cousin Blacky to send someone else?"

"It isn't necessarily military training. What bothers me is that I may be assigned to work in a distant place," mused Da-shwey.

"We can't plant this land without you," worried his father.

Da-shwey didn't know what to think. *Dyeh* was getting old, and Ru was still too young to do any really heavy work on the farm. Da-shwey loved their bit of soil and ramshackle old hut, and hated to leave. Since Blacky Tsay was out of the village he decided to take his problem to Shwang.

Before he had a chance to open his mouth, Shwang, cheerily congratulated him on his opportunity to attend the cadre school.

"You'll improve culturally and in political understanding. You'll be an important cadre when you come out. I hope you won't look down on us poor clods!" he kidded.

"How come you send him, but don't send me?" grumbled Twur.

"What's your hurry? When he comes back, you'll go. We're sending one man at a time."

When he saw that people were fighting for the chance to attend the school, Da-shwey felt differently. He hurrried home to pack. He reassured

* "Mother's — " was originally a full phrase with very vile connotation. In its present contracted form it is still profanity but its intensity of meaning varies with the speaker and the circumstances. Like certain four-letter Anglo-Saxon words it is used as almost any part of speech.

his father that the training was a good thing, and he told him what had happened at Shwang's place. *Dyeh* didn't try to dissuade his son any further. Instead, from the recesses of an old trunk, he dug out a wrinkled bank note and gave it to Da-shwey for pocket money. The next morning, carrying his bedroll, Da-shwey departed for the school.

The school was situated in the town now serving as the county government seat. On his way Da-shwey called on Blacky Tsay in another village. They had barely exchanged greetings, when a young woman rushed in. Her striped gown was covered with dirt, her hair all awry. It was Mey!

"Save me, brother-in-law!" she begged Blacky. "They won't let me live!"

Her big tear-filled eyes noticed Da-shwey, and she quickly turned her head back toward Blacky. For a moment she couldn't speak. Gradually, under Blacky's patient questioning, she told what had happened after Jinlung had dragged her home.

"So! You like to go visiting!" he had said. "The least little thing and you run to your brother-in-law!" He slapped her face, hard, several times, then locked her in the room. After that, he and his mother kept piling Mey with work though virtually starving her.

"If you go to Shenjya Village again, I'll break your legs!" warned her mother-in-law.

Mey couldn't stand it. She waited until one night when Jinlung didn't come home to sleep. Just before dawn, she climbed out the window, scaled the wall and ran away.

"I can't go on living there any more," she said to Blacky, in a calmer tone of voice. "Didn't you say that old and young, men and women, all should fight the Japs! I want to join the Red Army's Women's Auxiliary. I can't read or write, but I can carry water and run errands. . . . Anything, anything rather than live with those devils!"

Blacky frowned thoughtfully. "Suppose we send you for some training, how about that?"

"What does that mean, 'training'?"

"Training is a fine thing!" Da-shwey joined in hastily. "It will improve your learning, it — it — will give you political understanding. . . . It's just like going to school!"

"Good, then I'll go for training. Anyhow, I won't go home!" said Mey.

Blacky wrote a letter of introduction for her, and she went with Da-shwey and the other new students to the training school. Her in-laws searched for her for a long time, but couldn't discover where she had gone.

*

The county training school was located in a compound containing several large buildings. Da-shwey and the others presented their letters of introduction to the dean, a man about thirty. His name was Cheng, and he wore a uniform of coarse grey cloth. After registering the students, he asked Mey in a friendly manner why she had come to the school.

Mey reddened and stammered and finally blurted, "To receive training!"

Chen carefully explained the purpose of the school until she began to understand.

"Oh . . . ," she smiled, "the training is so that we don't have to stay at home, but can work outside!"

The dean laughed and made some notations. He then asked Da-shwey the same question.

Da-shwey stepped forward and made a formal bow. "To fight the Japs to a finish!" he replied in a loud voice.

Chen returned the bow. "If you were given command of a group of men, would you have the courage to lead them?"

"I would!" roared Da-shwey.

Cheng nodded and turned to question the others.

When the interviews were over, the dean divided the students into classes. Men and women were in the same classes, although they were quartered separately. Da-shwey and Mey were assigned to one study group.

Da-shwey suddenly remembered his letter from the Party, certifying that he was a Communist. He yanked it out of his pocket and waved it at Cheng excitedly.

"Who do I give my 'membership' letter to?" he yelled.

Cheng hastily pointed at Miss Chen, a woman about forty, seated at a desk in the far corner of the room. She smiled, holding out her hand to receive the credentials.

"Don't make such a row," she said quietly. "There are plenty of non-members here."

The preliminaries were completed.

When the training period started, Da-shwey and Mey had a hard time becoming accustomed to it. There were classes during the day, and discussion meetings at night. Everything started with the blowing of a whistle — getting up in the morning, going to bed at night, exercise, singing . . . until they were dizzy. It was a full schedule.

Nearly three hundred students all ate together in one mess hall. The diet was very simple, usually millet and turnip soup. Their meal time was short. Da-shwey could eat quickly with no ill effects, but Mey raised blisters on her lips from the scalding soup.

At night, the men students slept on the floor of a big room. Their mattresses were straw filled pallets; they used bricks for pillows. The women students didn't have it quite so hard; they slept on a *kang*. While at least they were off the floor, the *kang* was unheated and the weather was bitterly cold. Mey hadn't brought any bedding. She doubled up with an older girl named Tien and one of them was always half uncovered. The cold, knotting into cramps the muscles in the calfs of Mey's legs, would wake her up in the middle of the night and make her cry with pain. She wished she were back with her sister and had never come to the school!

Tien had graduated from high school and was a Party member. She would massage the calfs of Mey's legs and comfort her like a sister. Sometimes she would buy little hot rolls and share them with Mey, saying, "You eat one and I'll eat one. We'll study hard together, and not think about home."

Mey didn't want to go back to her in-laws. She also knew that if she lived with her sister, sooner or later Jinlung would catch up with her. At least at the school she was free. She cut her hair short and determined to stick it out.

Da-shwey was also cold and uncomfortable at night, but what troubled him most were the classes. The students were from every walk of life, some with a little schooling, others with none. They dressed in every kind and manner of costume. Da-shwey was typical of the local peasants, in his torn padded jacket bound with a sash under which he stuck his long-stemmed, short-bowled pipe, like a dagger. His head was covered by a coarse white towel to protect it from the sun and dust.

The students would sit in the sun in the courtyard and hold class. Da-shwey would take a place up front, straining his ears to everything that was being said. But what was meant by "the present circumstances" or "united front", or "guerrilla tactics", he had no idea.

One of the instructors had been on the Long March. He had such a thick Hunan accent that once, when he asked Da-shwey a question, Da-shwey could only stare at him blankly. In addition to his other difficulties, Da-shwey couldn't write. Watching some of the students busily taking notes on the lectures, he said to himself, "It'll be a happy day when I can do that!"

When they would break up into their small discussion groups, Da-shwey and Mey would sit by, silent. Asked why they didn't speak, Da-shwey replied, "I'm a farmer. If you told me to talk about crops, I could do it. But how in the world can I make a speech?"

Mey was so shy that the students urging her to recite sometimes made her cry. Still, the group kept after them — "Just memorize a few points and say them. In that way you'll gradually learn."

Da-shwey tossed and turned for several nights, unable to sleep.

"We're a couple of stupid hicks," one day he said to Mey, very distressed. "What'll we do if by the time the course is over, we still don't know anything?"

Mey, too, was worried. "We stuff ourselves with the school's food every day, but when we go back home, how will we be able to face people? It looks like we can't keep up with the others."

"I don't believe it," said Da-shwey staunchly. If the others can learn, so can we!"

Everyday, Dean Cheng taught them a few new characters during their rest period. Lying on his bed at night, Da-shwey would practice writing them with his finger on his chest. He forced himself to listen still more attentively to the lectures and began to make a little sense out of them. Determined to learn to speak in public, he stood up in the discussion group, and bathed in sweat, managed to struggle through a fair number of disconnected phrases. Mey, her face scarlet, also wrenched out a few sentences. The group applauded them and said they were doing fine!

Da-shwey was the hardest worker in the school. He got up in the morning earlier than any of the men in his dormitory. After scrubbing their wash basins, he swept the courtyard and the offices. Dean Cheng once publicly commended him as a model student in practical life. This considerably embarrassed Da-shwey.

"We farm boys aren't good for anything except to use a little muscle once in a while," he said sheepishly.

Finally, Da-shwey could see that he was beginning to make some progress, but he was afraid that Mey was falling behind. One day he asked her, "How are you getting on? Are you used to this life now?"

Mey nodded her bobbed head, and her port sunburned face dimpled in a charming smile. She was relaxed, gay, and her big eyes shone.

"Completely!" she answered.

She told him how Miss Chen had explained to them that their hard life at the school would help forge them for the difficulties they would have to go through in fighting the Japs; that they must learn to cope with all kinds of trouble.

Da-shwey was pleasantly startled. Mey has really made progress! he thought. He watched her walk jauntily away, her bobbed hair ruffling in the breeze.

*

That day, Da-shwey ran out of pipe tobacco. He suffered for a couple of hours, then he sneaked out to a nearby shop and bought two cigarettes. Under the strict school discipline, no one was allowed to buy cigarettes. He hid himself in the men's toilet, and lit up. Just as he was blissfully exhaling his first puff, another student came in. Too late, Da-shwey hastily ground the cigarette out beneath his heel. The student glanced at him a moment, then went out to report him.

In the evening a meeting was called of Da-shwey's study group, and they went at him with a will.

"Why can't you follow instructions? . . . Don't you know what discipline means? . . ."

Red in the face, Da-shwey stammered, "I . . . This is the first time . . . I didn't have any more tobacco . . . Lay off me . . . If you excuse me this time . . ."

Before he had a chance to finish, one student after another began popping up calling, "Mr. Chairman, I have something to say! . . ." Criticism rose from all over the place. They said he wouldn't accept criticism, that he was insincere. Even Mey joined in with a "Mr. Chairman, I wish to report . . ."

What's so terrible about smoking one lousy cigarette? Da-shwey thought angrily to himself.

"Just for that, I won't smoke any mother's — tobacco the rest of my life!" he swore, breaking his pipe over his knee. "You'll see whether I can change! There isn't a real Chinese living who can't take it!" Furiously, he flung the pipe pieces on the ground and stalked out.

The next day Da-shwey was still angry and resentful. He spoke to no one and answered no one, including Mey. In the afternoon, Dean Cheng called him to his office. He first let Da-shwey pour out all his imagined injuries. Then, with a smile, he patiently explained.

"All that criticism, light and heavy, was for your own good. If you can't take criticism, you won't be able to progress. You're a Party member. You should set an example by preserving discipline even better than the other students."

Cheng cited various cases involving discipline and showed how necessary it was for effective operation. The more Da-shwey listened, the calmer he

became. Finally, he said, "Thanks for straightening me out. I understand now."

That evening, there was a meeting of Party members. Da-shwey admitted he had been wrong and added with a big grin, "I've been pretty thick, but I think my mind is clearer now. I hope you'll continue to point out my faults. I promise not to let my bull's temper run away with me again!"

The others laughed. They said that once his faults were corrected, they were no longer faults, and he could keep on improving.

Da-shwey did improve, and so did Mey, to such an extent that Tien was thinking of sponsoring her to join the Communist Party.

"Who do you think are better, the Kuomintang or the Communists?" Tien asked her.

"The Communists, of course!"

"Which party would you like to be in?"

"I don't want to be in any party, I want to fight the Japs. I'd like to join the Red Army Women's Auxiliary."

Mey remembered how her brother-in-law, Blacky Tsay, had been hounded because he was a Communist, and she was afraid of becoming a Party member. On the other hand, what she believed to be the free and independent life of the Women's Auxiliaries appealed to her.

Tien shook her by the shoulders. "You are dense! If it weren't for the Communist Party, there wouldn't be any Red Army. It isn't even called the Red Army any more — it's called the Ba Lu or the Eighth Route Army. As a Party member, you can attend meetings, know what's going on in the country, and continue to progress. You ought to give the question some more thought!"

Mey considered and pondered but couldn't make up her mind. She sought Da-shwey's advice.

"How can you be so dumb!" he fretted. "Membership is the most secret thing in the Party. How can you ask me about a thing like that?" Not realizing he was spilling the beans himself, he continued, "It's a good thing I'm a Party member, otherwise you'd be telling Party business to outsiders!"

Mey was frightened. "What'll I do? I've already told you!"

"You'd better join," said Da-shwey, extremely confidentially, "then you'll learn to have discretion in matters of this sort!"

Mey told Tien that she had decided to become a Communist. Miss Chen helped her fill out the necessary forms. Mey, and ten other girls, went through the ceremony of joining the Communist Party. Before the Party flag and a picture of Chairman Mao, they pledged their allegiance. . . . Thereafter, Mey and Da-shwey attended classes for Party members together.

*

One afternoon, a man of medium height, wearing a uniform, came to the school and asked to see the dean. About 27 or 28 years of age, with a mouth full of gold teeth, he carried a package under his arm. After Cheng received him, the man courteously asked whether there was a student by the name of Mey in the school. Cheng said there was. The man then stated that he served in the Hojwang anti-Japanese militia, which was under the over-all leadership of General Lu. He said that Mey was his wife and that he entirely approved

of her receiving training at the school; that he had come to see her, and had brought a package for her. Cheng said it probably was all right and asked him to wait a minute, while he went to call Mey.

By the time Jinlung had smoked two cigarettes, the dean returned, alone. Cheng looked him over carefully and said, "Mey doesn't want to see you. She says you beat her."

Jinlung laughed deprecatingly. "What husband and wife don't have their little domestic tiffs? After all, I'm not her enemy. Can she refuse to see me indefinitely? I'm a soldier in the militia. Dean Cheng, do you think she's being reasonable?"

"We advocate harmony between husband and wife," said Cheng slowly. "You can see her if you want to, but you must promise not to beat her."

Jinlung swore by all that was holy. Dean Cheng brought Mey.

Jinlung greeted her effusively and with much affection. He asked many solicitous questions, then opened his package and took out a woman's long padded gown.

"Put it on. The weather is so cold — we can't have you getting sick! If you need anything, just tell me. Wear the gown; we'll go to a restaurant and have a good meal!"

Mey had never seen him act so nice, and her heart softened. After receiving permission from the dean, she went out with Jinlung.

It was a cloudy nasty day. There was no wind but the cold seeped into your bones. At the restaurant, Lyew and Syow, who had been waiting for them, had reserved a warm comfortable room. Jinlung ordered the most expensive food and wine.

"Mey," he said during the meal, "before you left home, you didn't say a word to any of us. Relatives, friends, neighbors, everybody laughed at me. You put me in a very embarrassing position!"

"I'm studying hard now," replied Mey. "When I finish the course and work in the anti-Japanese resistance movement, you won't be embarrassed but proud of me."

"Women have long hair, but they're short on common sense! What kind of work can a woman do, anyway! The best thing would be for you to come home with me. There's still a place for you at our table."

Mey now knew what he was up to; her face fell. "I don't want to go to a home where I'm beaten."

"It was my mother who beat you. I've already spoken to her about it. I admit I sometimes lose my temper, but you can't stay away indefinitely!"

The food now seemed very distasteful to Mey. She stood up. "I've got to get back to the school. They're waiting for me. I've already been away too long."

Jinlung yanked her back to her seat. "What's your hurry!"

Mey uneasily watched them finish their meal. Lyew and Syow went out and Jinlung paid the bill.

"You're going back with me today," he said. "Let's go!"

"You ought to tell the dean first!" said Mey frantically, her eyes filled with tears.

"I'll take that responsibility," said Jinlung curtly, taking her roughly by the arm and propelling her toward the door. "You don't have to bother."

She could see through the open door that Jinlung's two cronies were waiting outside with a horse. Sobbing bitterly, Mey braced her feet on the high door sill and her hands on either side of the doorway and refused to budge. Jinlung began pulling her.

"You'll come if I have to carry you!" he shouted.

A crowd collected both in the restaurant and in the street. Jinlung produced a pistol and brandished it. "What are you looking at! She's my wife and I'm taking her home! There's nothing to see! Go on, beat it! Beat it!"

The crowd gave way.

Lyew and Syow lifted the struggling Mey on to the horse's back, then led it down the road. Jinlung, pistol in hand, formed the rear guard.

Snow began to fall from the leaden sky; an icy wind rose in fitful gusts. Astride the horse, Mey shivered with cold and despair. Just as they reached the outskirts of the town, she suddenly flung herself to the ground. She rolled a few paces, staggered to her feet, and started screaming at the top of her voice.

Jinlung prodded her sharply with the gun. "Keep going or I'll kill you!" he grated.

"Kill me then! I'm not going!" she flung back.

Jinlung undid his heavy leather belt and raised it to strike, when a group of running, panting men appeared on the crest of the hill. They were the students from the school, with Da-shwey in the lead!

Jinlung jumped on the horse and shook his finger at Mey. "All right! You're a hard one!" he snarled. "I'll be seeing you again!"

He dug his heels into the horse's flanks and galloped off, his two cronies pounding after him. They soon disappeared in the swirling snow.

Chapter III

The Guerrillas — 1939

Jinlung returned to the village of Hojwang, where he continued to fool around in the militia. Although the militia was supposed to be part of the Jap resistance movement, it spent most of its time squeezing the peasants. Its members still considered Ho as their personal warlord, and were interested only in eating, drinking, women and gambling. Jinlung had a fierce jealous quarrel with Gwo over some slut. A few days later, Gwo's gun went off "accidentally" and shot Jinlung in the stomach. It was a severe wound and he nearly died. . . .

When the peasants' reactions to these goings on reached the ears of General Lu, he promptly dispatched troops to reorganize the militia. Ho knew his activities couldn't stand much close scrutiny. With Gwo and a few others of the same cloth, he went over to the Kuomintang anti-Communist movement in the region. Jinlung was still sick in bed, so he remained in Hojwang.

Mey finished her training at the cadre school, and joined the Women's Anti-Japanese Association of the district. She refused repeated requests of her in-laws for her to return home. Now, they had no way to force her to comply.

After the completion of his course, Da-shwey went back to Shenjya Village, where he became head of the Peasants' Union. Under a new law that taxes must be paid according to land holdings, each person was required to register the area of his farm. Investigation revealed that Shen the mayor had falsified his report and was concealing land. Shen was so humiliated when this fact became public that he resigned. A special election was called and Da-shwey was chosen mayor.

Dyeh was afraid that Da-shwey's duties would interfere with his work on the farm. He was more afraid that the election of a poor farm boy as mayor would offend the gentry. At the same time, *Dyeh* felt it a great honor to his family that his son had become an "official".

An old neighbor wagged his head in approval. "The boy has got something in him. Practically only yesterday he was gathering manure in the road, and now he has a high position!"

Dyeh naturally was very pleased with this kind of talk. "He knows what he's doing too!" he added.

"Our cadres are different from the old style officials," laughed Da-shwey. "We only want to serve the people."

Dyeh stroked his beard complacently. "The boy had a little training, and now he can read over one hundred characters!"

"Over two hundred," Da-shwey corrected him.

"I never thought I'd live to see the day when one of us poor peasants should have a position of authority. Do a good job!" the old neighbor urged.

Da-shwey bought an automatic lead pencil, clipped it into his dispatch bag, adjusted the bag strap across one shoulder and proceeded to his office. On the street he met Mey, holding a small brief case under her arm.

Her complexion was blooming and her eyes danced as she gave him a big smile. "You look very business-like with that bag!"

He pointed at her case and grinned. "What about you?"

He asked what she was doing in the village. She said she had come to see him. What did she want to see him about?

"I've come to organize the women in the village. You're the mayor, aren't you? Of course I have to speak to you first!"

They both laughed and went to the office.

"Has Jinlung recovered yet?" Da-shwey inquired.

"Who knows? I haven't gone back."

"Have they bothered you again?"

"His father, his uncle and his mother all came after me several times. The old lady raised a terrible rumpus at the district office! Luckily, Blacky Tsay was there. He said, 'If you make any more fuss, old lady, I'll have you arrested!' That scared her and she ran."

"Those people are a menace!"

"I'm in the resistance movement. What can they do about it? Forget it, let's talk business. How do you think I should go about organizing the women here?"

"Your sister is very familiar with village conditions. Work with her and you can't go wrong. If there are any questions that she can't help you on, come to me."

They talked for a while longer, then Mey went to her sister's house.

•

In the spring the Japs were close to the village. They took the cities and the big towns, and made frequent raids against the country-side. Most of the village militiamen joined adjuncts of the Ba Lu Army, which were called "regional armies" in that they operated within areas comprising several provinces or parts of provinces, and were not sent to other parts of the country, as were the regular field armies.

However, the regional army men devoted their full time to soldiering, and their posts were often far from their native villages. To take over the work of the militias, a guerrilla force was organized in each village. Groups of villages were administered by a Central Village. Shwang became mayor of one of the Central Villages and also served as the Communist Party branch secretary. Da-shwey was appointed military leader of the consolidated guerrilla forces of the villages under control of the same Central Village.

The guerrillas still tilled their fields when they weren't fighting, but as a leader, Da-shwey was required to spend all his time at his duties. He was clothed and fed, and received two dollars a month. His village assumed the responsibility of helping his father on the farm. *Dyeh* was completely satisfied with the economic arrangements, but was afraid Da-shwey would have to go to battle.

"If we don't fight the Japs, and they come here, then what?" asked Da-shwey. The two had quite an argument, but in the end Da-shwey's determination won out.

All the way to the Central Village, he worried about his lack of military experience. The minute he arrived, his brows puckered in a frown, he asked Shwang, "Do you think I can handle this job?"

"You'll learn, gradually," said Shwang. He introduced an old soldier. "This is Captain Ping, formerly in the Northeastern army. He's got plenty of experience and he's going to help you."

Da-shwey, relieved and delighted, plunged into eager conversation with the old captain. When Shwang presented a heavy calibre pistol which the district government had issued, Da-shwey pulled it gingerly from its holster as if afraid it would go off.

"How do you work this thing?" he asked in embarrassment.

After the old captain showed him, Da-shwey hung the pistol around his waist. He thought it was beautiful.

A few days later, at sunset, Da-shwey under the tutelage of the old captain was drilling the consolidated guerrillas. A little boy came running up.

"Some traitors in civilian clothes, carrying guns, are over at Dung Yu Village!" he breathlessly reported. "You'd better hurry!"

"Do you know how to use your guns now?" Da-shwey excitedly asked the men.

"Sure!" they chorused.

"When the time comes, let 'em have it! Come on!" He pulled out his pistol and took off, with the men running steadily behind him. They carried every kind and variety of antiquated fowling piece, shotguns, and not a few crude home-made weapons.

At Dung Yu, they were told the traitors had just left the village and were heading north.

Da-shwey was about to go after them, when the old captain, breathing heavily, caught up. "This way is no good!" he panted. "Rushing helter-skelter — they'll knock off every one of us!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Twur, who was Da-shwey's second in command. "They've got guns and we've got guns. How are they going to knock us off?"

"What if they take cover? We're a big group. They can see us coming a mile off. We won't have a chance!"

"That's right," said Da-shwey. "What do you think we should do?"

"Split up into three groups. Twur take the first group, circle round them and cut off their retreat. I'll take the second group and attack from their right flank. You lead the third group in a direct assault along the road, but move cautiously. We'll have them covered from three sides. On their fourth side is water. Let's see where they can escape!"

Everyone approved. Twur and his men left first. The old captain and his group, bending forward as they ran, started circling toward the enemy's right flank. Da-shwey's men advanced straight ahead.

It was dark by now, and there was no moon, only a sprinkling of stars. As he moved ahead with his men through the open country, Da-shwey's thoughts ran riot. This is our first real engagement. I'm excited and a little scared! What if we walk right into them without having a chance to get set?"

One of the men tugged his sleeve. "Isn't that them? A whole bunch of men!"

The speaker was "Jumpy" Ma, so called because though older than the other men, he had nerves of mush, and would jump at the sight of his own shadow. Knowing Jumpy's timidity, Da-shwey peered skeptically in the direction indicated. Sure enough, he could make out the murky figures of several men! His heart pounded. Then he noticed that Jumpy and Gulu, formerly one of Mayor Shen's worthies, were sneaking back to the village.

"What the hell are you running for? Take cover!" he flared.

The knees of Jumpy and Gulu were knocking in fright. "Ah . . . where do you think is a good place?" quavered Jumpy.

"Any place where your body is out of sight," hissed Da-shwey, "and stop making such a damned racket!"

The two flopped on their bellies in the field and frantically covered themselves with loose bits of grain stalks. "We'll be right here if you want us!" said Gulu tremulously.

Da-shwey's group had no sooner taken cover than the other side opened fire.

"Shoot, shoot!" cried Da-shwey. His men returned a roaring volley.

"Son of a bitch!" groaned Hoshang, one of the guerrillas.

Da-shwey's heart sank. He crawled over to him. Hoshang was carefully aiming, then pulling the bolt!

LO KUNG-LIU: The Militiamen in Action

"I can't make this infernal thing fire!"

"Mother's — !" swore Da-shwey. "How is it going to fire if you don't pull the trigger!"

He took Hoshang's finger, put it on the trigger and pulled. The gun went off with a blast that made Hoshang jump!

Just as the firing was at its height, off to the side, a high pitched voice called, "Stop firing! Da-shwey, stop firing!" It was the old captain.

Da-shwey quickly gave the order to cease fire. The men opposite them also stopped shooting, and a few of them began advancing toward the guerrillas. Da-shwey's brain was in a whirl.

The old captain wheezed into sight. "What are you shooting at so blindly?" he said angrily.

From the side of the "enemy" came the sound of Twur cursing. "You dumb bastards were firing at us!"

Hoshang jumped to his feet. "— your grandmother! Did you shoot at us first, or did we shoot at you?"

"Stop it, stop it!" said Da-shwey. "Where is the enemy?"

The old captain swore a blistering oath. "They beat it long ago!" he said.

Bickering and unhappy, the guerrillas returned home.

*

A few mornings later, they heard that the traitors were raiding the mayor's office in Hsi Yu Village. The guerrillas wanted to rush right over.

"Let's give those turds a reception!"

"Take it easy," said Da-shwey. "We want to do it right this time."

"It's daylight and we can move quickly," said the old captain. "We'll surround them, cover them from all sides, and we won't get into trouble."

"Fighting in broad daylight, we won't shoot at one another!" said Twur happily.

"Right!" said Da-shwey. "Let's go!" The guerrillas set out.

About a quarter of a mile from Hsi Yu, they broke into a trot. The old captain, puffing, gradually fell behind. When they reached the entrance to the village, he called after them, "Leave a couple of men here to stand guard!" No one paid any attention. They all dashed ahead to "surround" the enemy.

The mayor's office was in a row of low buildings built in a hollow square. From the outside, the guerrillas climbed on the roofs of three of the wings to give themselves a clear line of fire against the mayor's office in the fourth wing. The old captain laboriously clambered up after them.

"Where are the enemy?" Da-shwey asked him softly. "Maybe they're all gone."

"Throw something," ordered the old captain.

The men picked loose tiles off the roofs, and flung them showering into the mayor's office. There was not a sound in response.

Twur was impatient. "What's the matter? I'm going down to have a look!"

He lowered himself from the roof, and walked across the still courtyard, his rifle in his hands. He kicked open the door of the mayor's office. The sharp report of a gun from inside sent him dashing for cover to a small mill shed

in the corner of the courtyard! The traitors let go a volley at the guerrillas on the roofs, then came piling out across the courtyard toward the open door of the compound.

Da-shwey ducked his head behind the low parapet on the roof. "They're coming out! Fire! Fire!" But he himself couldn't fire because his pistol jammed!

The guerrillas were taken by surprise. Before they knew it, the traitors were out streaking down the road.

"Follow them!" roared the old captain.

The men scrambled down from the roofs and went tearing off in pursuit. At the outskirts of the village, the guerrillas began firing at random as they ran. Somehow, in the confusion, Twur shot Gulu in the arm. Everyone stopped to give him first aid and the enemy got away.

*

Back at the village, the old captain was so angry he could hardly talk. "I quit!" he fumed to Shwang. "These guys aren't fighting, they're playing some kind of a game! I've been in the army over ten years, and never met such a messed-up bunch. . . . I — hell! I quit!"

"Take it easy, old-timer," soothed Shwang. "Until a few days ago, the only thing these fellows ever held in their hands was a hoe. You can't suddenly switch to a gun and expect them to know how to fight. It's like a cripple carrying water — you've got to go slowly with them — step by step. We'll call a meeting the first thing tomorrow, and you can 'enlighten' them."

Shwang's last phrase brought a grin to the old captain's face. "All right, all right!" He didn't say any more about resigning.

Da-shwey hated the whole world and himself most of all. I'm a fine leader, he thought morosely. I take a group of men to fight, the enemy gets away, and we shoot one of our own men! Sunk in gloom, he heard Gulu's mother shouting outside.

"Where's Da-shwey? Why did he let my son get shot? What kind of a leader is he anyway!"

Da-shwey was ashamed to face her. He went into the next room and closed the door.

Enumerating Da-shwey's faults forcefully and in great detail, the old lady came into the office.

"He's not here," someone said.

The old lady spied Shwang. "Mayor, what am I going to do? If my son can't work, who'll take care of me?" she said tearfully.

Shwang tried in vain to calm her.

Gulu, his arm swathed in bandages, also closed in on Shwang. "Twur had nothing against me, what did he shoot me for?" he demanded piteously. "Da-shwey doesn't care! I won't be able to work and my family'll starve! Twur can't shoot me and get away with it! I'll sue him!"

"That's enough now!" said Hoshang, who was getting pretty sick of all this moaning. "Twur didn't shoot you on purpose. He feels very bad about it. Besides, it's only a flesh wound. Who says you won't be able to work!"

"Only a flesh wound! Only, he says! I'll take a shot at you and see how you like it!" said Gulu indignantly.

He and his mother and Hoshang began all shouting at one another. When Shwang finally got them quiet, he said the organization would pay 200 lbs. of millet as compensation. The old lady promptly replied that it wasn't enough. After a good deal of bargaining, Gulu and his mother left with an order for 250 lbs. Everyone sighed with relief.

No sooner were they gone than Jumpy Ma came in to surrender his gun. He had talked it over with his wife. They had a little land and enough to eat. He was through with fighting. It was too dangerous. A man could get hurt!

"Are you going to be afraid all your life?" asked Shwang with a smile. He explained at some length how it was necessary to fight the Japs in order to protect the land.

Jumpy finally saw the point. He took back his gun and left shamefacedly.

Shwang cheerily entered the room where Da-shwey was hiding and clapped him on the shoulder. "Don't worry, we settled the case of our wounded hero!"

Da-shwey, his head sunk on his chest, made no reply.

"What's wrong!" Shwang asked.

"I quit," mumbled Da-shwey.

"Good!" laughed Shwang, pulling him by the arm. "I quit too! Let's all go home!"

Da-shwey suddenly shook himself free. "Shwang, I feel terrible. Please don't kid around."

"I'm not kidding. I want to talk to you. Come on, come on — we'll go eat at my place." Shwang half dragged the reluctant Da-shwey to his house.

After dinner, the lamps were lit and Shwang came right to the point. "Why do you want to quit?"

"I can't lead men, and I don't know how to fight. What's the use?"

"Generals aren't ready-made the day they're born. Everybody takes time to learn."

"I can't learn, I — I'll do something else!"

"What the hell is the good of that? We must learn to fight, or when the Japs come here we'll all be sunk!" He could see that Da-shwey was really low, and he softened. "You feel badly about one of our men being shot. Was there ever a battle without men getting wounded? Tomorrow we'll all talk this thing over, discuss what mistakes we made, and how to avoid them in the future." Then, he added quietly, "Blacky Tsay says Communists mustn't be afraid of set-backs. The harder things go, the tougher we become, until we're like steel and afraid of nothing."

That night, Da-shwey stayed at Shwang's house. He couldn't sleep and he still felt miserable, but he knew that Shwang was right.

*

The next day, a meeting was held of the leaders of the militia. Blacky Tsay also came back to the village to participate. He grinned as he opened the meeting.

"Our guerrillas fought two battles. While we didn't exactly win, at least we scared the enemy away!" That got a laugh, and Blacky continued, "Seriously though, we're all farmers and it's not easy for us. We have shortcomings, but we can overcome them. As the old saying goes: 'Men are sharpened by their experiences like a knife on a whet-stone.' Let's tackle this thing and smooth out our rough edges."

The old captain spoke up. "I say we're too disorganized! The men go into battle like a swarm of hornets. It just won't do! In the army when an officer gives a command everyone must obey. When he says go east, you go east. When he says go west, you go west. Then nobody makes mistakes. If we don't take orders, how are we going to fight!"

A general discussion began about errors.

"I made a mistake," blurted Da-shwey, his face burning. "Yesterday, during the fighting, I couldn't make my gun fire. When we got back, I checked it and found that the safety was still on!"

Everybody roared, but some began shouting, "Don't laugh! Don't laugh!"

Twur made himself heard. "That's right! None of us can afford to laugh. I'm a fine one. I shot one of our own men! Hereafter, if I don't aim carefully, I don't shoot. Any shooting I do will be at the enemy!"

The old captain jumped up, pleased and excited. "I say when we fight again we've got to have a plan; we've got to have scouts; we've got to have liaison; and we've got to have strict discipline!"

"Right!" said Shwang. "Let's draw up a set of rules right now!"

Rules were written down, and it was agreed that anyone who breached them would be fined.

Da-shwey was feeling himself again. "Now we've got something to go on!" he said cheerfully. "This thing is too important. We've got to go over these rules one by one with the men. Everybody must memorize them. We weren't so good in the last fight, but we'll see what happens next time!"

Blacky Tsay was delighted to see that the men were back in high spirits. "That's fine!" he commended them. "You have self-confidence and courage. After another couple of battles, you'll have experience too."

"You must learn to cope with emergencies," he said to Da-shwey, with a twinkle in his eye. "The ship is safe only if the helmsman keeps calm and orderly. You control your lieutenants; they'll control the men, and there'll be no problems."

After the meeting, Blacky Tsay went back to the village of Hsi Yu, the district government seat. Da-shwey went with him to attend a meeting of the leaders of the various village guerrilla organizations. Mey was working in Hsi Yu and he hoped to see her at the same time.

*

That afternoon, as he walked down the lane in which Mey lived, Da-shwey heard a woman asking someone for directions to Mey's house. He recognized her as the well known "Goldy", famous in Hsi Yu for her abhorrence to sleeping alone. (The local expression for that sort of a lady is a "broken shoe".) Her face was heavily powdered, her hair gleaming with oil. Wearing a red jacket

and tight-fitting green trousers, she waggled provocatively as she walked.

"What do you want to see Mey about?" he asked.

"What do I want to see her about? Hmph! I'm going to take her to court!" raged Goldy tempestuously.

Da-shwey was puzzled. He went on ahead and entered Mey's courtyard. He called a few times, but no one answered. He went into the house, and found Mey sitting on the *kang* with a blank, abstracted look on her face.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked anxiously.

Mey slowly came to life. "I'm leaving my job!" she retorted bitterly.

Da-shwey almost laughed aloud with relief. He asked her what was wrong.

"I can't do that kind of work . . . it's too aggravating!" Mey was outraged, and rather incoherent. "Everyone said she was all right, that she'd work hard . . . we elected her chairman of the Women's Association. . . . How was I to know she was that kind of woman . . . a hussy! And — and — she had the nerve, in front of everybody, to call me a broken shoe!" Mey's tearful voice was rising in a gradual crescendo as she spoke. When she squeaked out the last infamy about the "broken shoe", she broke down completely, and cried with all the vigor of a good woman wronged.

Da-shwey still wasn't quite clear about this disaster, and wanted to ask more details, when Goldy's hoarse voice was heard bellowing outside. "Where are you, Mey? We're going to court!"

Da-shwey hurried out to the courtyard. "What are you making such a racket about?" he shouted.

For the benefit of the neighbors, who were now all avidly listening, Goldy made her reply as dramatic as possible, with much tossing of the head and sweeping gestures of the hand. "She fired me from the chairmanship of the Women's Association. I don't mind that so much. The job didn't pay anything anyhow! What I want to know is where does she get the nerve to say I keep lovers, I'm a broken shoe, a tramp? I won't stand for it!"

Da-shwey laughed coldly. "You want to take her to court because she said you keep lovers. Well, don't you?"

Goldy glared at him. "This is between me and Mey. You butt out!" She started walking toward the house.

Da-shwey blocked her way, and in a loud voice let the neighbors hear the other side of the story. "How come Jang and Fatty San had a fight in your house in the middle of the night? Why did Law chase you down the street with a pair of shears?. . . Why!"

That took the wind out of her sails, but she tried to keep up a front. "This only concerns the Women's Association. What is Mey to you that you're so damned eager to stick up for her?"

Da-shwey pushed her toward the door of the courtyard. "Don't put on any airs with me! You wouldn't stand a chance before a judge. On your way!"

At the door, Goldy fired her final shot. "You ought to learn to keep your big nose out of other people's business!" She left with an indignant swish of her hips.

Mey smiling through her tears, welcomed Da-shwey back in the house. "You certainly showed her up! That bitch has been making life hell for me."

"Are you still going to quit?" laughed Da-shwey.

"What for? It's my job!"

With an approving nod Da-shwey passed on the lesson he himself had recently learned. "Everybody, at some time or other, has difficulty in his job. We Communists mustn't be afraid of trouble. The harder things go, the tougher we must become, until we're like steel and afraid of nothing!"

After chatting for over an hour, Da-shwey suddenly remembered how much work was waiting for him back at the Central Village. He reluctantly turned down Mey's invitation that he stay for dinner and rushed off.

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In May, the spring wheat was ripe. All of the guerrilla bands took positions around the fields to protect the harvesting. Da-shwey's men were stationed along the dyke. For three days there was no sign of the enemy. The cicadas droned incessantly in the hot sun. Some of the men dozed in the shade of the willow trees on the side of the dyke. Some swam lazily in the river. Others helped the peasants cut the grain.

A scout came splashing across the shallows to announce that the enemy was already at Shatan, a village about half a mile inland from the opposite bank of the river. Da-shwey tore up and down the dyke, excitedly blowing his whistle to summon the men. Some of the swimmers, in their hurry, dashed back stark naked, with their clothes in one hand and their rifle in the other.

"The Japs are at Shatan!" Da-shwey was soaked in sweat. "Get ready, and nobody fire until I give the command! Does everyone remember our regulations?"

"Yes!" cried the men.

"Good," said Da-shwey, "I'm going to be rough on anybody who breaks them!" He waved his hand. "Get going!"

The men ran to take the pre-arranged positions on the dyke, and lay prone along the inner side. At the suggestion of the old captain, a messenger took the news to Blacky Tsay at the district government.

Pistol in hand, Da-shwey restlessly went from one position to another, exhorting, "Remember — look first, aim carefully, keep calm, don't get panicky!"

The men lay motionless on the slope of the embankment, and tensely watched the opposite shore.

They waited for a long time, but still no sign of the enemy. Da-shwey felt there was something wrong.

The old captain raised himself and took a careful look. He grabbed Da-shwey's arm. "See? Over there!"

They had all been so busy staring straight ahead that they hadn't noticed a group of about ten Japs and traitors coming out of a grove of trees on the opposite shore, far down the river.

"What'll we do?" asked Da-shwey in a lather.

"It's all right," said the old captain reassuringly. "It's too deep over there. Right here in front of us is the only place the river is shallow enough to ford. They've got to come here. Tell the men not to fire until the enemy enters the water."

Da-shwey passed the word that he would call "one . . . two". "Two" was the signal to fire.

Holding their breath, the men peered over the top. Steel-helmeted Japs carrying rifles and walking in single file were being led by a traitor to the bank opposite. The Japs started to wade across.

"One!" yelled Da-shwey.

A rifle cracked. It was Hoshang. He couldn't wait and had forgotten his instructions. The rest of the guerrillas followed suit.

The Japs were startled and ran back, leaving the traitor who had been leading and one Jap dead in the water.

"Save your bullets! Don't shoot unless you can see them!" shouted the old captain.

Twur jumped up. "Let's get those guns out of the water!" Several men clambered over the dyke and ran with him into the shallows.

"The rest of you stay back!" cried Da-shwey. "They'll attack again!"

Twur brought back a Jap rifle. Another man carried a steel helmet; a third, a cartridge belt. They were grinning happily as they climbed over the embankment. Jumpy Ma was still in the stream, pouring water out of a high pair of leather Jap boots. He was older and slower than the others.

"When did you get so brave, Jumpy?" called Da-shwey from the dyke. "Hurry up!"

Jumpy said he was coming. He hung the boots around his neck. Several shots had smashed the traitor's head to a jelly, and his white brain matter floated on the surface of the water.

In the afternoon, the enemy, in much larger numbers, again emerged from the grove of trees on the opposite bank, downstream. In the lead was a Jap officer wearing a big samurai sword. Beside him, a standard bearer carried the flag of the Rising Sun. Bugles could be seen gleaming brightly. The Japs planted the flag on a high mound in front of the grove, the officer drew his sword, the bugles blared, and the enemy began running toward the shallows.

On the dyke, the men faltered at this formidable display. Da-shwey's heart pounded. How can we hold off so many of the bastards? Just then, led by Blacky Tsay, the county militia came running up and flung themselves, panting, besides the guerrillas! The bolts of their rifles clicked.

"Get ready," called Blacky. "No one fire until I give the signal!"

The enemy opened up with rifles and a machine gun. Bullets whistled overhead. Impatiently awaiting the signal to fire, the guerrillas and militiamen hugged the ground. The enemy entered the shallows, crouching. The sun flashed on their bayonets. At Blacky's hoarse shout, the men let go with a devastating volley. The leading Japs dropped in their tracks. The others turned and fled, covered by the chatter of their machine gun.

The Japs attacked three more times, and each time were blasted back.

*

Night fell, and the enemy retreated to Shatan. The sound of their rifles and their high pitched savage cries could be heard faintly in the distance. Tongues of flame hungrily licked the outskirts of the village.

On the dyke, the men rested wearily and gazed at the star-laden summer sky. Their throats were raw and parched. Bull frogs croaked monotonously.

"Someone's coming!" whispered Jumpy, pointing down the road from their own village. The men could make out the indistinct figures of a long line of people, heavily burdened, slowly coming in their direction.

"It's the peasants, bringing food!" said Blacky to Da-shwey. "Take some of your men down first and eat. After you've rested, come back here and we'll go."

Da-shwey's men met the peasants at the willows, about one hundred yards back from the embankment. The guerrillas ate ravenously and drank huge quantities of water.

Shwang handed out cigarettes which the peasants had brought. "You fellows really ate! The women will be here soon with wheat cakes that they're grilling. Where are you going to pack it all?" he joked.

Twur loosened the belt of his trousers. "Don't worry, we'll find a way!" he grinned.

Da-shwey's younger brother, Ru, who was the head of the Youth Corps, helped carry ammunition and hand grenades up the dyke. Liu, one of the guerrillas wanted a cigarette and Ru ran back and fetched it for him.

"Are you tired?" he asked Liu.

"Tired?" said Liu. "Fighting Japs is a pleasure!"

Ru looked at him with admiration and a little envy. Liu was only five or six years older than he.

"Liu," he pleaded, "let me fire your rifle once."

Liu helped him load and explained, "Hold the stock firmly against your shoulder, otherwise the recoil will knock you over."

Ru raised the gun, clenched both his eyes tight, and fired.

"That's not right," laughed Liu. "Watch me."

With the lighted cigarette dangling from his lips, Liu took a stance and looked through his sights for a target.

A Jap sentry, across the river, guided by the glowing tip of the cigarette, dropped him with one shot. He was dead before he hit the ground.

Da-shwey rushed back at the sound of the shooting. When he saw what had happened he angrily berated Ru. The boy was so shocked he hardly heard what was being said.

Blacky Tsay ordered that the body be removed. "It's all because of that damned cigarette!" he said grimly. "No one is allowed to smoke. No one! You men are to stay down and keep your eyes on the enemy!"

The morning star gleamed in the western sky. Mey and the women, bringing more food, were met by Shwang at a little hamlet about a third of a mile from the dyke.

"Blacky says not to come any closer. Stay here." He led them to a courtyard where some women were cooking gruel on a couple of large stoves, then he went back to the dyke to summon the men.

Blacky again sent some of Da-shwey's men first, because they had been fighting the longest. As soon as they arrived in the courtyard, they were surrounded by bustling women with steaming platters.

"You poor boys must be terribly hungry! . . . Go ahead and eat. You need your strength! . . ."

One of the girls grabbed a Jap helmet and put it on her head. "Why don't they wear a regular pot instead?"

The younger girls giggled.

"Don't be fooling now," ordered Mey. "Serve the food!" To the men, she said apologetically, "We're sorry to be bringing this stuff so late. We had a hard time collecting it in a hurry."

The women passed out boiled eggs, grilled wheat cakes, hot rolls, pickled duck eggs, and bowls of gruel. "Eat heartily," they said. "You can fight Japs better on a full stomach!"

Mey was pregnant before she went to the cadre school, and now her abdomen sagged heavily. Da-shwey didn't think that in her condition she should be running around so.

"We'll help ourselves," he said. "You women have been up all night preparing food and carrying it all this distance . . . you ought to rest a while."

"Listen to him!" Mey laughed. "If you men can fight all day and all night and not be tired, what have we got to be tired about?"

The meal finished, the men regaled the wide-eyed women with details of the battle. Before long a rooster crowed and a cool breeze began to stir.

Suddenly there was the sound of rifle fire. The old captain got to his feet. "That's the Jap dawn attack!"

Da-shwey put down his bowl. "Let's get back!" He and the men snatched up their rifles and hastily fastened the clasps of their cartridge belts. Da-shwey turned his head to call, "You women had better move back toward the village!"

"Don't worry about us," said Mey. "We'll be all right."

The women peered anxiously through the early morning mist, as the men ran at full speed to the dyke.

*

The guerrillas found the county militia under heavy fire. Blacky said the enemy was about to charge and everyone must hold firm. Almost immediately after, their bayonets flashing wickedly, the enemy came splashing across the shallows. The guerrillas feverishly pumped lead into them. Many Japs fell, but they kept coming and reached the shore.

Jumpy Ma and Hoshang became terror-stricken. Deathly pale, they edged back down the embankment.

"I'll kill any man who runs!" roared Blacky. "Men, throw your grenades!"

He took four in his huge paw and flung them in a wide arc. From all sides, the men let go with their bombs. There was a deafening roar, as limbs and bleeding flesh went flying to the sky.

Another wave of Japs hit the shore, to be greeted with a hail of hand grenades. The blast churned earth and smoke and dismembered bodies. Still the Jap commander waved on his men. Then on the opposite shore in the Japs' rear and on both their flanks rifles began to crack. It was the guerrillas whom Blacky Tsay had sent while Da-shwey and the others were eating! Panic-stricken, the Japs ran in disorder, dropping weapons as they scrambled over one another in their haste.

Blacky, stripped to the waist, his dark body gleaming with sweat, raised his pistol. "After them!" He jumped down the embankment and charged into the water.

"After them! Kill!" screamed the men. They tore after the fleeing Japs.

Chapter IV

Dirty Jap Tactics — 1939

The day after the rout of the Japs, gifts for the guerrillas began pouring into the office of the Central Village from all the neighboring hamlets. The peasants brought chicken and duck eggs, dumplings and sweet meat, whole sheep and pigs, and gunny sacks full of knitted socks! Blacky Tsay found Mey in the office, her eyes dancing, surrounded by the presents. He took her off to one side.

"Your mother-in-law is very ill" he said. "Your father-in-law has come to ask you to go back. He says if you don't hurry, you'll never see her again alive." Blacky continued saying that the mayor of Hojwang had sent him a letter stating that Jinlung's wound was healed, and that he was behaving better since Ho, the bandit leader, had gone. Jinlung had told the mayor that if Mey would return to see his dying mother, he would be very grateful and he promised not to curse or beat her.

"When Jinlung was shot, you never visited him," said Blacky. "Now your mother-in-law is on her death bed, and your father-in-law has pleaded so pathetically. . . . I'm afraid if you don't go back this time, it'll create a bad impression. Besides, your child will be born soon. Perhaps it'll be more convenient for you to give birth at home. . . . "

With tears in her eyes, Mey said she didn't want to return. But after much urging from Blacky she finally consented and left with her father-in-law.

The same night that Mey reached home, her mother-in-law died. The whole family became busy with funeral rites for several days. No sooner were the rites completed than Mey went into labor and prematurely gave birth. The child was skinny as a pullet, but he was a boy, and his grandfather was delighted. From then on, the old man went out of his way to feed Mey well. He wanted to win her over to bring up the child at home and not go back to work.

Now that her cruel mother-in-law was dead, Mey fared much better. Under the new administration, Jinlung could no longer riot and bluster as before. Mey was a district government cadre. During her month's recuperation at home after the birth of the baby, he saw how she was constantly visited by peasants and cadres, how women came to her with their problems, and he didn't dare to ill-treat her.

For a long time Mey had been considering divorce, but now that the child was born, she felt it should have a father and a normal family life. For the sake of the baby she decided to resume her position as Jinlung's wife.

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It was a cloudy, rainy autumn. The waters in the river and in the lakes rose dangerously. There had been an excellent crop that year, and the peasants feared there would be floods before they could harvest. After a meeting at the county government, Blacky Tsay called a hurried conference of the cadres of all the Central Villages in his district. He set forth a plan for guarding and strengthening the dykes.

"This is a war duty, a war in which we must fight the torrents!" he said. "It will also be a test of our cadres. We'll see who's really willing to protect the interests of the people!"

Shwang and Da-shwey, the same night, mobilized the peasants administered by their Central Village to work on the dykes. The waters were only a foot from the top. The rain fell incessantly. The night was so black that you couldn't see the man in front of you. Reed torches were lit, and from a distance, the dyke looked like a fiery dragon. The people rushed about, filling in badger holes and piling earth to keep pace with the rising waters. They worked all night, but by morning the rain was still descending in sheets, and the water level was higher. Soaked to the skin, the peasants vowed that they'd keep on working, "even if it rains knives!" No one stopped to eat. The struggle went on all through that day and night.

The morning of the third day, the rain increased in intensity. The water rose more quickly. It was only two or three inches from the top of the dyke.

"It's no use," sighed the old men. "No matter what we do, it's hopeless!"

There was no time now to add to the whole top of the dyke. It was decided to construct a narrow mound running along its middle.

Stumbling and slipping, Shwang went from section to section. "Build a central mound . . . we can still save it . . . it's life or death now! Drive stakes, anything will do!" he exhorted. "No matter what happens, we've got to see it through!"

Most of the peasants and cadres rushed back to the village to get material. Cadres ran through the streets beating gongs and crying, "The dyke is in danger! Everyone to the dyke! Bring anything that can be used for a mound!"

All the villages were aroused. The old captain got out of a sick bed and took a pole. Men, women and children carrying bundles of stalks and baskets, dragging rafters and cross-beams from their houses, headed for the dyke. Da-shwey ripped the doors from the guerrilla headquarters, lifted them on to his back and plodded toward the river.

Mey was at home when the gongs and shouting in her village made her heart jump. She put down the baby, dashed into the courtyard, grabbed a roll of reed matting, and heedless of the cries of her father-in-law, ran toward the embankment.

On the dyke, there was wild confusion. Clear blows of the stake-driving mallets punctuated the welling sound of many voices shouting at once. Carry-

ing soil and boards, people scrambled up and down the embankment. A breach in the east section sent everyone rushing to block it. Then the west section cracked open five feet wide. The muddy water ripped through with a powerful rush. Da-shwey, Twur, and a dozen other young men jumped into the torrent, pushed a door lengthwise across the breach and began backing it up with earth. Too late! Door, earth and men were swept back into the fields as the raging waters smashed their puny block and widened the gap to ten feet! The dripping men climbed back on the dyke and in hopeless desperation watched the pouring flood eat through the sides of the fissure. Then, the old captain and Shwang spied a barge loaded high with reeds. It had broken its moorings and was being borne swiftly downstream. Together, they waded into the swirling yellow river, intercepted the barge, and towed it to the breach.

"Knock a hole in its bottom!" they shouted. "Fill it with clods of dirt!"

In twenty seconds, the boat was sunk firmly across the break, reeds and all. All the heavy objects at hand were piled on top.

"Form a line! Pass up earth!" yelled Da-shwey.

From hand to hand, great chunks of earth flew to the dyke, and were dumped into the barge. Cadres leading reinforcements came running from other villages. Mud was rammed in and around the boat, until it was completely covered over.

The breach was checked.

Near dark, the rain stopped. A dense fog hung over the land and water. No one dared to rest. As night closed in, lanterns and torches were lit. The morning of the fourth day dawned to reveal no further rise in the river. Still the men kept to the dyke. Late that afternoon, the waters began to recede. Only then, did the sick old captain totter back to the village.

The men relaxed a little and gazed at their flourishing green fields — the *kaoliang* ten feet tall, tassles waving on the corn, the bursting cotton bolls, rippling wheat — it was going to be 80% good harvest. Some of the old men murmured a prayer of thanks. Children began to play again. The young peasants said that even if they had work twice as hard, it would have been worth it!

All praised the untiring labor of the cadres — how they had fought the flood for three days and three nights without sleep and nearly nothing to eat. The peasants urged them to go home and get some rest. Da-shwey and Shwang eyed one another.

"Hey," said Da-shwey, "you look just like a mud buddha!"

"Don't you recognize your own brother?" Shwang retorted. "We're two of a kind!"

Laughing, the cadres slowly walked back to the village.

Nearly every room in the village administration office was leaking. Da-shwey and Shwang finally found one that was fairly dry, and washed some of the mud off their faces. Shwang could hardly stand. Da-shwey looked at his thin face, paler than ever, bloodshot eyes half closed. Shwang had been a weaver and used to weave twelve bolts of flowered cloth in five days, working right through the nights. It ruined his health and he still coughed blood when over-tired. But he was a Party member, and when he had a responsibility, he would toil feverishly until it was finished. The last three days on the dyke

had exhausted him. He couldn't keep his eyes open, but he started to clean his rifle. Da-shwey's heart went out to him.

He grabbed Shwang's gun and pushed him toward the *kang*. "You should see what you look like! I'll clean it for you. Get some sleep."

"Nothing doing," said Shwang, snatching for the rifle, "you're just as tired as I am!"

The two pulled and wrangled. The result was that Da-shwey cleaned Shwang's rifle and Shwang cleaned Da-shwey's rifle. They sat opposite one another on the *kang* in stubborn silence until the job was done. Both were overcome with fatigue. Without eating, like animals worn out by plowing, they stretched out and fell into a deep sleep.

That night, the peasants ate their dinners with a light heart, and went to bed early. The teen-age guerrillas took turns guarding the dyke. Twur volunteered to supervise.

After midnight, the Japs went by boat through the dark and landed several miles up the lake. They rounded up nearly three hundred peasants and drove them to the dyke. Those who tried to run, were shot. Those who refused to work, were thrown into the water. The remainder were forced to dig a deep trench about a quarter of a mile long on the land side of the dyke. A hole was dug completely through in the middle of the weakened section. Everyone ran to both sides as far and as fast as their legs could carry them. The water poured through the break. Then, the whole thin partition collapsed. The flood cascaded into the fields with a roar that could be heard five miles away.

Da-shwey and Shwang were sleeping like the dead when Twur came running in. He pounded and shook them awake.

"Get up! The enemy has broken the dyke! The water is coming!"

They jumped to their feet and climbed on the roof to look. In the streets the guerrillas were shouting warnings. "Everybody up! The flood is coming!"

White capped waves were rolling closer and closer, as if in pursuit of the foxes and rabbits which fled terrified before them. A delicate crescent moon shone with a cold silvery unconcern, as the crops — the beautiful crops — were buried beneath a mountain of turbid water!

The flood raced across the fields towards the village. There was no time to check it. People, hauling provisions, clambered on to their roofs. Some rushed for the bank and their boats. The dirty water smashed into the village. The cries and shouts of the peasants blended and were lost in the howl of the flood.

"Oh God, we're all going to die!" an old lady screamed.

Da-shwey felt as if his heart had been pierced with a knife. He sobbed with uncontrollable bitterness.

Millions of sparks burst and glowed before Shwang's eyes, his chest burned, a brackish taste climbed in his throat. He was convulsed with a dreadful paroxysm of coughing raw blood. With his back against the parapet of the roof, he slid from his feet to a sitting position, as he panted and fought for breath.

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That year, the Japs inundated thousands of acres in several counties, as part of a planned campaign to break the peasants who were daily swelling the ranks of the resistance movement. The Communist and government authorities mobilized the peasants in the unaffected areas, raised money and collected provisions. Cadres conserved their own food and clothing so that there could be more to send to relieve the disaster victims. Boat after boat arrived carrying grain and fuel.

When the waters receded, the government brought seeds to plant wheat. The women were organized and supplied with reeds with which to weave mats and baskets. All kinds of handicraft and part time work opportunities were created for everyone in the stricken villages. Slowly the flooded areas began to recover.

During their relief work, Da-shwey and Shwang often went to Hojwang. There they saw Mey several times. No one in her household could fish or do anything productive and they would have starved, were it not for the relief which the government furnished. Although he didn't say anything, Jinlung was very grateful. So he was quite receptive when Mey showed him a letter she had received from Blacky Tsay urging her to return to work. It was arranged that she would take the child with her and come home for visits whenever possible. Jinlung helped her pack. Surprised, his father called him aside to ask how was it that he was letting her go?

"I might as well," said Jinlung. "The authorities wouldn't stand for it any other way." Carrying the baby, he escorted Mey to the district government seat.

Several weeks later, the old man called for her and brought her and the baby home for the New Year's holidays. Jinlung picked up the child and marveled how he had grown. Very friendly, they chatted, laughed and played with the baby.

The next night, on the street, Jinlung met Goupi, the son of Ho, the bandit who had turned traitor.

"Let's go to my house and do some drinking!" said Goupi.

Jinlung, never a man to turn down a drink, went willingly. The meeting wasn't quite accidental, for Ho, hiding at home, had sent his son to fetch Jinlung.

Ho had been operating in Kuomintang territory ever since General Lu of the Ba Lu Army had broken up and reorganized the former brigands, Ho's included. On his way to the city held by the Japs, he had sneaked home to see his family. He knew that Jinlung was brave and a good shot, and he wanted to take him along.

Goupi and Jinlung entered Ho's palatial residence. They walked through the family temple, crossed a courtyard, opened an elegant door in the north wing and stepped into a warm and brightly lighted room. Smiling broadly, Ho rose from a round-backed armchair. Jinlung started on surprise, for Goupi had said nothing about his father's return. Ho had a soft lamb's wool hat on his head and wore an expensive robe lined with fox fur. His face glowing and ruddy, he seemed even fatter than before. He told Goupi to pour the wine. The three began drinking.

Ho became hotter and more jovial as he drank. He removed the lamb's wool hat to reveal a glowing bald pate. Fixing his beady eyes on Jinlung, he asked many solicitous questions.

"Why have a hard time at home?" he said winningly. "Come with me! I've known you for more than ten years. You're capable and I trust you. Stick with me and I'll see to it that you rise in the world. I'd rather have one dragon like you than a dozen performing bears! If I didn't consider you as one of my own family, I wouldn't talk to you like this." He patted Jinlung's knee. "Think it over, think it over!"

"Where do you want me to go?" asked Jinlung.

Ho took a long drink. "You have to understand the present situation," he answered slowly. "We don't have to worry about the Japanese. It's those rotten Communists! They're going to make all wives common property and it'll be terrible! The way their power is increasing every day is very dangerous. Long ago, our superiors decided on a course of action. We'll help the Japanese wipe out the Communists, then we'll resist the Japanese. Our deputy premier, Mr. Wang Ching-wei, has already established a government in Nanking. In name, it obeys Japan. But we are actually preserving our strength and authority. Later, we'll be in a position to do things. You don't want to believe those Communists. They're like a rabbit's tail — they can't grow any bigger! I'm asking you to go with me to the city. When the Communists are wiped out, the power over this several hundred square mile area will be in the palms of our hands!"

Jinlung was very taken by the prospect, but he still hesitated. "Where is Gwo?"

"Old Gwo and Lyew and the others are already in the city, waiting for me," said Ho and added with a laugh, "I made all the arrangements with the Japs. Everyone of us, big and small, will be an official."

Jinlung was so drunk that the veins stood out on his forehead. He put down his wine cup. "Commander Ho," he said solemnly, "you know me . . . speak frankly and to the point. . . . If Gwo is in . . . I'm out!"

Ho and his son made light of Gwo having shot Jinlung and said of course he hadn't done it purposely. Finally, after much soothing and persuasion, Jinlung muzzily gave his consent.

As he was leaving, Ho gave him two ounces of opium. "Don't breathe a word of this to anyone!" he warned. "I'll notify you when we're to go."

Jinlung staggered home.

*

Mey had put the baby to sleep and was sewing in the light of the lamp. It was late and she was sure Jinlung was up to no good. The oil in the lamp was almost all consumed when he stumbled in, his face flaming with drink.

"What do you mean by coming at this hour!" demanded Mey. "Where've you been?"

"No place in particular," mumbled Jinlung. "I met a friend and we had a couple of drinks."

"Who was he?"

"No one you know." Jinlung sat down on the *kang*. "I'm dry as a bone. Get me some water."

As soon as Mey left the room, he quickly took the opium packet from his pocket and hid it in the back of a picture frame. That didn't satisfy him.

He took it out again and lumbered about the room searching for a safe place to conceal it. At last, he crammed it into an old shoe underneath a chest of drawers. He undressed hastily, jumped into bed and fell asleep.

Mey had been watching the whole show through the window from outside. She came in, set the water down on the table and softly drew the oiled paper packet from the old shoe. She opened it, saw that it was opium, closed it again, and put the packet in her bosom. Then she awakened her husband.

Jinlung sat up and drank some water. He looked at Mey with red rimmed eyes. "It's late, come to bed."

"I won't sleep until you tell me what you were doing tonight!" retorted Mey angrily.

"I only had a couple of drinks. I didn't gamble, I didn't fool with women. What are you so excited about?"

"All right! You won't tell the truth — hereafter you go your way, I'll go mine! We're through!"

"Don't talk nonsense. I'm not going anywhere. Aren't I taking care of you? Come on to bed. . . ."

"Why are you so stubborn? You still won't speak! I ask you — where did you get the opium?"

Jinlung was startled, but he forced himself to stare directly at Mey and ask, "What opium?"

"You don't have to pretend," said Mey. "I saw you. I don't want the stuff, I only want to know who gave it to you. If you tell me, there won't be any trouble; otherwise, you'll be sorry!"

Jinlung was cornered. Afraid she'd raise a row, he said casually, "Goupi gave it to me."

"What for?"

"He thought I could sell it and use the money. He knows we need help."

"Oh? Just after the flood when you sold him our grey thrush to raise a few pennies — why didn't he help us then?" Jinlung was silent and Mey continued, "We're husband and wife. Anything that concerns you, good or bad, I should share. What are you concealing from me? Tell me — I'll never harm you. Tell me in detail what this is all about."

Since he had already started talking and because she was pressing him so hard, Jinlung reluctantly revealed a little more. "Actually, I got the opium from Goupi's father, but you mustn't tell it to a soul!"

The picture was becoming clearer every minute to Mey. She pretended to be unimpressed. "Oh, is that all? Why did he give it to you?"

"So many questions about such a little thing! Ai! You are the limit!"

He got down off the *kang* to see whether the opium was still where he had hidden it. Mey laughed and handed him the oiled paper packet. "Isn't this what you're looking for? It's worth money. You shouldn't keep such a valuable thing in an old shoe — it's liable to spoil. Put it away carefully!"

"I'll sell it the first thing in the morning. You'll get your share," said Jinlung with a conspiratorial smirk.

"What's this talk of sharing between us" replied Mey. "What does he want you to do? If it's to our good, I'll help you put it across!"

Jinlung was drunk and he found Mey's affectionate concern irresistible. "Ho wants me to go to the city with him," he whispered. "Don't worry, I'm not going! -- my great-grandmother if I'm lying!"

"It's up to you whether you go or not," said Mey with a dazzling smile. "You shouldn't curse so!" She blew out the lamp, undressed, and got into bed.

Before long, Jinlung was sleeping soundly, Mey listened to his steady breathing for a few moments, then lightly got down from the *kang* and put her clothes on. She covered her head with a blue cloth cowl, softly opened the door and slipped out. The moaning wind ripped through her thin clothes and numbed her body with cold. Alternately running and walking, she reached the administration office of the Central Village. She pounded on the door until Shwang stumbled sleepily from his bed. Quickly, she told him the whole story. Then, fearing that her absence might be discovered, she ran all the way home.

Shwang roused Da-shwey. After a hurried consultation, they led the guerrillas to Ho's residence, surrounded it, posted men on the roof and climbed over the wall into the inner courtyard. Guns in hand, they searched every room and every compound, but Ho and his son were nowhere to be seen!

Chapter V

The Groom — 1940

Ho's family had a big wolf-like dog. Only a month ago, the villages had ordered that all dogs be killed so that there would be no barking to betray the movements of the guerrillas. Ho's family had protested that their dog didn't bark and didn't bite and that they had paid a great deal of money for it. The cadres in the village were still rather afraid of Ho, and his dog was spared.

When Da-shwey and the men had surrounded Ho's house, the dog set up a fierce clamor. Ho woke up and quickly dressed. His son Goupi came running in and said, "It's bad. They're all over the place!"

Ho hastily took his leather portfolio and a pistol. "I've got to go," he told his concubine. "Don't be afraid. I'll send someone to fetch you in a few days."

He and his son went into a small room, pushed aside a chest, and lifted two large flaggings beneath which was a flight of stairs. In the light of Goupi's flashlight, they descended. The concubine replaced the flaggings, pushed the chest back in place over them, and returned to bed. Swinging open a revolving door at the foot of the stairs, the two men entered a tunnel. Because the village was near the lake, the tunnel wasn't dug very deep for fear of striking water, and was tightly lined with clay bricks. They followed the tunnel to where it emerged from beneath the altar in their family tomb, outside the village. They switched off the flashlight and headed for the Japanese-held city.

The guerrillas searched Ho's house until morning, but all they could find were seven rusty rifles. Shwang and Da-shwey sent the men back to the adminis-

tration office with the rifles and instructed them to tell the "weed-out traitors" committee to investigate Jinlung. The two leaders then went to the district government to report the incident to Blacky Tsay.

About a week later, during the New Year's holidays, Blacky shaved off his beard, put on his best clothes, and with his wife and child came to Hojwang to spend the day with his relative Jinlung. Mey's father-in-law, highly honored by being called on by a district leader, treated Blacky with the utmost courtesy.

After they finished lunch, Blacky and Jinlung went into the next room where they chatted idly. Blacky asked how Jinlung's wound was.

"It's completely healed, but the after-effect is that I can't do any work. We're having a hard time getting along."

"Don't worry, Jinlung, our anti-Jap government will never let your family starve."

"We're completely dependent on you," said Jinlung humbly.

"Whatever difficulties you have, don't hesitate to speak. If you're tired of sitting around the house and want something to do, it can be arranged. Our strength is growing. The Japs don't fear the Kuomintang but they're afraid of the Communists. There's no doubt that we'll defeat them. It seems to me that a capable fellow like you, if you used your talents to work for our country, could be a big help in China's fight."

Jinlung expanded under the compliments. "What talents have I got?" he replied deprecatingly. "I just drift from day to day."

"There are plenty of capable people. The question is whether they take the bright road or the dark one. Some of them work for the Japs. They get the stinking name of a traitor and it's a hard one to lose. Others struggle toward the light and become national heroes. They're welcomed by the people wherever they go."

This last remark made Jinlung jump inwardly. He felt sure Blacky knew about his connection with Ho. He stole uneasy glances at Blacky while trying to give the appearance of carrying on a casual conversation. But Blacky was entirely affable in his manner and the talk turned to other topics.

In the afternoon, after Blacky went to the village administration office, Jinlung lay on the *kang* deep in thought.

"You'd better tell my brother-in-law all about that business with Ho," said Mey. "If you speak openly, they won't hold anything against you, but if you hold back, they'll look at it in a different light."

"I have nothing to tell."

"Don't you think they know? How do you expect to get away with it?"

Jinlung was positive it was she who had reported him to Blacky. Seething with rage, he jumped up and shouted, "They know because your rotten mouth told them! Mother's — ! I'm going to fix you to-day!" He grabbed a broom handle and raised it to strike.

Mey pointed at him and laughed. "Go ahead and hit me — I put honey in your mouth and you try to bite my finger! How can you be so dense! Of course they know. Didn't they go to arrest Ho? There isn't a wall in the world which hasn't a crack. It's impossible to conceal things in this town. Blacky even talked to me about your opium. For deliberately and secretly dealing with a

traitor, the least they could do is to arrest you. But instead they're being generous and not calling you to account. What have you got against me?"

Jinlung continued to glower at her, but he flung down the broom handle. With a "mother's — !", he got back on the *kang*.

Mey sat beside him, warm and intimate. "Jinlung, take advantage of the chance that Blacky's in town. Tell him the whole story, roots, trunk, branches and leaves. Though not an important one, I am a cadre, and I guarantee that nothing will happen to you."

Jinlung pondered for a long time. At last he said grudgingly, "I'll talk to him, but I won't give up the opium!"

"Do as you like. If it were me, I wouldn't take anything from a traitor even if it would save me from starving to death! A Chinese ought to have a little backbone!" Angry, she left the room.

Later, Blacky returned, and Jinlung whispered to him for nearly an hour. Blacky was delighted. He assured Jinlung that his conniving with Ho would be overlooked. Thus encouraged, Jinlung produced a small packet of opium and handed it over.

"I was really only waiting for you to come to give you this. I knew the whole affair was wrong from the beginning."

Mey, who had just entered, smiled at Blacky. "Jinlung, after all, sees things very clearly. He absolutely refused to go with Ho."

"What is a man without honor?" said Jinlung virtuously. "I'm no traitor. He couldn't buy me with all his money! Anyone who works with the Japs is a no-good bastard!"

Just before Blacky left, he said to Mey, privately, "He's at the crossroads now. You must influence him for the good. He's a fine marksman, and he has other useful qualities. Try to induce him to join in our work. Don't let the traitors get him!"

Mey promised to do her best. Blacky and his family took their leave.

*

During the remaining few days of the New Year's holidays, Mey catered to Jinlung's every whim, and at the same time kept urging him to take a job. The night before she was to return to work, just before bedtime, she asked him, "What about it? If you're willing, tomorrow you can go with me."

Jinlung, smoking his last cigarette, was already on the *kang* wrapped in a quilt. He didn't answer.

"We both could work and progress together," she said.

"If you go and I go, who'll take care of my father?"

"Ai! Forget it! What good can you do him staying at home? Besides, if we're both working, the village administration will look after him."

Jinlung crushed out his cigarette butt, took off his robe, rolled himself into the bedding. "It's after midnight," he said evasively. "I can't keep my eyes open, let's go to sleep. Don't keep harping on the same thing — we'll talk about it again later."

"You're a fine one! You've been loafing so long that you're spoiled for anything useful! Worker, farmer, soldier, student, merchant — which are you?

If you join the resistance movement, I'll be honored; if you continue to lay around the house — I can only be ashamed! Unless you stop this idleness, I'm going to leave you!"

"Ai! All you can talk about is a damned job! What kind of work do you want me to do?"

"You've been fooling with guns for so many years, you're an expert rifleman. I envy you because you can fight the Japs directly by joining the army!"

The minute he heard "join the army", the conversation was finished, so far as Jinlung was concerned. He rolled over, and said firmly, "Nothing doing! Life in the Ba Lu Army is too hard — who can stand it?" Mey talked herself hoarse, but he persisted, "Anyhow, a man should be like a fish in a stream, and flow with the current. You don't have to bother about me!"

Mey saw that he was worthless. She stood up furiously. "All right! Go on, be a traitor — that's all you're good for! Stick to eating, drinking, whores, gambling — never mind about face and conscience!"

"What are you talking about!" shouted Jinlung angrily. "Who's a traitor? Don't go smearing dog dung on other people's faces!"

Mey ignored him. She moved her pillow to the opposite end of the wide *kang*, blew out the lamp, undressed, and rolled up in her own covers. Jinlung wrathfully flung himself back in his quilt.

They turned their backs on one another, and there was a long, strained silence. Jinlung could hold out no longer. He dragged his pillow over next to Mey.

"Don't be so cruel. We can still talk this over. What's the use of getting excited?"

"I've been trying to talk to you nicely. You ought to be more far-sighted. Life in the Ba Lu Army isn't easy, but you can learn a lot there. Look at me — I've only been working a short time, but I already have a much better understanding of things. I can read a letter and write a note. A grown man like you doesn't even recognize a single word! If you join the army and study hard, you'll keep improving and be doing something worthwhile."

"I'm only afraid that I'll be sent far away," said Jinlung playfully. "I can't bear to leave you!"

"You're joking and I'm talking seriously. If you're really against being sent to a distant post, we can ask Blacky Tsay whether he can't find something for you in the county militia."

Jinlung laughed pleasantly. "That's fine! If you had suggested that in the first place, I would have agreed long ago!"

The next day, without having said anything to his father, Jinlung went with Mey to the district government seat to see Blacky Tsay.

*

At the district office, Blacky was discussing the affair of Ho with Da-shwey. They had learned that the day after Ho escaped, Shen, the former mayor of Shenjya Village, had also fled. Someone remembered seeing them conferring furtively a few days previously.

"The fox and the badger get along well together," said Da-shwey. "I'm sure Ho convinced him to run away."

Blacky nodded. "Ho probably filled him with false stories and scared him into leaving. The family he left behind must be treated like everybody else. Later, we should try to convince him to return."

Dean Cheng, who was also the Communist Party secretary of the county, arrived and had a talk with Blacky. Thereafter, Blacky instructed Da-shwey.

"There have been some changes in the assignments of cadres. Go back and tell Shwang to report here immediately for work in the district. You will take over his job as mayor of the Central Village. . . ."

"Aiya!" interrupted Da-shwey. "What about my duties as leader of the militia?"

Blacky smiled reassuringly. "Make Twur the leader, and you be his assistant."

"I'll get started right away," said Da-shwey. He went to draw his ration tickets.

As Da-shwey was crossing the courtyard he saw Mey, baby in arms, entering Blacky's office, followed by Jinlung carrying his bedroll. Da-shwey had no chance to call to them before they disappeared through the doorway. He proceeded to the ration office where the man in charge was busily clicking out calculations on the abacus. While waiting patiently for him to finish, Da-shwey could hear the sounds of cordial conversation coming from Blacky's office, though he couldn't make out what was being said.

How is it that guy Jinlung still hasn't been arrested? he wondered. He finally received his ration tickets and as he again stepped into the courtyard, he came face to face with Mey and family, who had just finished their business with Blacky.

Jinlung nodded his head in greeting and smiled affably. "Keeping busy these days, Da-shwey?"

"Uh . . . where are you going?" stammered Da-shwey in confusion.

"It's all arranged, I've been assigned to the county militia!" Jinlung, wife and child sailed serenely out the compound gate.

Da-shwey angrily rushed in to Blacky Tsay. "What kind of business is this anyway! How can we give a job to Jinlung, a man suspected of being a traitor?"

Blacky explained the circumstances of Jinlung's reform. Da-shwey was mollified a little, though hardly happy about the situation. Still uneasy, he returned to the Central Village.

*

After Da-shwey assumed his new responsibilities, he was busier than ever. In addition to regular duties, the higher authorities had ordered that all studies be intensified, so as to improve the calibre of the work. The cadres invited the teacher of the local elementary school to instruct them in their spare time, and they made rapid progress.

One day, Da-shwey was sitting in the office slowly reading a newspaper aloud and following the line of print with his finger. His father entered, grinning and excited.

"Son, I've found you a bride! She lives in Hsye Liu. . . . Her name is Hwar. She's only eighteen and a very nice girl! She's just right for you! You're sure to like her!"

Da-shwey managed to get his father to sit down. "How can you talk of marriage in hard times like these, when none of us can eat his fill?"

"You don't know," *Dyeh* replied triumphantly, "I've been skimping and doing without for years, getting ready for this! Penny by penny I've saved a few dollars, and now the time has come. Her family is poor too, but they haven't asked for any money. All they care about is that you're a cadre in the Ba Lu and have a good character. Anyhow it won't cost very much. You don't have to worry about a thing, I've made all the arrangements!"

"Can she read?"

Dyeh was startled. "Aiya, I didn't ask! — Probably not. Eh, what does a country girl want to know how to read for?"

"If she can't read, I don't want her!"

The old man's beard bristled as he shook his finger at his son. "You only just learned to recognize a few dog claw-scratch characters, and you already look down on others! I put in a lot of time and effort and finally find you such a good girl, and you're full of conditions! If you don't go through with this thing, who knows when you'll ever have another chance!"

"She can't write and she won't be able to join in our work," mumbled Da-shwey. "She won't be suitable for me. . . . "

"Don't be so fussy, son," his father pleaded. "Where can anyone find a girl who's completely ideal? My hair is grey and you're over twenty. Let me arrange this for you while I still have my health. If you delay too long, I may not be here to see your marriage. . . . " The old man couldn't continue.

Moved and grateful Da-shwey made no further protest.

He was called into the next room on some business and was out for a considerable time. When he returned, his father was gone.

*

On March 18th, 1940, Da-shwey's younger brother Ru brought a letter from Blacky Tsay ordering him to return home immediately, and stating that Blacky would meet him there. Da-shwey put his affairs in order at the office, strapped his pistol around his waist, took his portfolio full of papers and set out with his brother. On the road, Ru looking pointedly at Da-shwey, kept dancing and singing:

Little fellow sitting on the door step
Sighing and crying for a wife.
Why, oh why do you want a bride?
To light the lamp and speak with me,
To blow out the lamp and sleep with me.

"What are you feeling so good about?" growled Da-shwey.

Ru impishly made an ugly face at him.

When they reached home, they found red lanterns hanging from the door, and good wishes written on red paper strips pasted on both sides of the entrance. In the courtyard friends were bustling about, boiling tea and steaming muffins.

Dyeh came out, grinning happily. "We've been waiting for you. Come and see your new room." He dragged his son into the house.

In the west wing of the little compound, the narrow farm implement storeroom had been cleared of its pitchforks, rakes, plow and harrow, and swept spotlessly clean. On a newly built *kang* was a borrowed bedspread. Two neatly folded quilts were placed beside a pair of pillows. The wall was decorated with a large character, cut out of red paper, meaning happiness, and a picture of a beautiful girl of the ancient times. In the center of the room was a table and two chairs. A pair of red candles and ingots made of fragrant silver paper, the latter to be burned as money offerings to the gods, were placed in the center of the table.

"You see," said the old man proudly, "I bought a little of this and borrowed a little of that, and everything is in proper style."

"Where's Cousin Blacky?" asked Da-shwey excitedly. "I have to arrange certain formalities with my superiors before I can get married!"

"You can relax!" his father chortled gleefully. "Your cousin approved long ago!"

A group of friends and relatives came dancing in, chanting, "New groom sees the new room! New groom sees the new room!"

The old man grabbed Da-shwey and dragged him up on the *kang*, where they stood out of the way while the merrymakers and a couple of tootling musicians made a circuit of the room and trouped out again.

"Da-shwey," said his father, taking a pile of new clothes from a small chest, "put these on. Your marriage sedan chair will be here soon and you'll have to go to call for your bride."

There were a long black robe, blue cotton-padded trousers — both of machine-made cloth! — gaiters . . .

"What'll I look like if I wear that stuff?" protested Da-shwey. "I won't do it!"

"Just try it on, like a good boy," cajoled his father.

Some of the other men helped Da-shwey change, paying no heed to his grumbling. They stood back and looked at their handiwork. The trousers were too long and the robe, which was supposed to reach his ankles, flapped about his knees. Ru crowned his brother with a shiny black skull cap with a red pearl-like button on top. It also was too small and perched on the top of his head.

"Wonderful!" said the old man with complete satisfaction. "Now you really look like a groom!"

Da-shwey examined himself in dismay. Then he flung the cap aside and began unbuttoning his clothes. "These things are for dressing up monkeys! I won't wear them!" he announced firmly.

Dyeh clutched his son's hands. "Don't take them off!" he pleaded. "I had a terribly hard time borrowing them! If you don't wear them, what will you wear?"

"I'm a cadre in the Ba Lu," groaned Da-shwey. "How can I be seen in an outfit like that?"

The men laughed and assured him it would be all right under these circumstances. His brother clapped the cap back on his head. Da-shwey glanced at

his father sitting exhausted and panting, his brow bedewed with perspiration. He reluctantly let himself be persuaded, but refused to part with his pistol.

"Why do you need a pistol to get married?" they kidded him.

"Our orders are that the gun must never leave the man and the man must never leave his gun," said Da-shwey firmly. Nothing could make him change his mind.

In the middle of the argument, Blacky Tsay arrived. He gaily congratulated the old man.

Da-shwey spread wide his arms. "Blacky," he said piteously, "look at what they're doing to me!"

Blacky laughed until he nearly burst. "What's the matter with it? — Bridegroom!"

"Now that the best man has arrived, we can begin," said *Dyeh* joyously.

Blacky took him off to one side. "I just got word that the enemy has become active west of here," he whispered. "I've got to go over there with the guerrillas and prepare the defenses. You people go ahead. I'll be back later."

Da-shwey overheard him and asked agitatedly, "Can I go too?"

Blacky grinned. "That won't be necessary. Twur will handle your job. You concentrate on getting married!"

Twur's little old mother, wearing a red flower in her thinning hair, had been chosen to accompany the groom to call for the bride. She hobbled over to Da-shwey on her tiny bound feet.

"Let's get into the sedan chair," she said. "It's time."

Da-shwey was horrified. "You mean I have to sit in a sedan chair too?"

"Did you expect to walk?" laughed the old lady.

"I've got a horse here," said Blacky hastily. "You can ride it and return it later. I can borrow a bicycle."

"That's right," agreed a neighbor. "A Ba Lu will feel better on a horse."

And so it was arranged. The old lady, after a few words of instruction to Da-shwey, entered the colorful sedan chair, alone, and he mounted the big roan horse. With the blaring musicians in the lead, the small procession set out for Hsye Liu, the village where the bride was waiting.

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Swaying on his slow moving horse, Da-shwey thought to himself — It's really funny! Yesterday, this was the furthest thing from my mind, and here I am on my way to get a wife! Hwar . . . what kind of a girl is she? Is she as nice as Mey? Ai! It's gone this far, let's take what comes! Anyhow, I can teach her to read and get her to join the resistance movement. . . .

They ascended the dyke and followed it north along the lake. The musicians, the flowery sedan chair, Da-shwey on the big roan, a few guests walking in the rear, proceeded slowly beneath the line of weeping willows which shaded the dyke and caressed the surface of the water with fresh green feathery tendrils. From a little boat bobbing on the wind-ruffled lake a young man could be faintly heard singing of peach blossoms and of the thumping of a flower's heart at the approach of a bee.

They soon reached the village of Hsye Liu. Still under the spell of the lovely spring day, Da-shwey mused somnolently on his coming marriage. He laughed a little, for no reason.

As they entered the main street, suddenly, several shots rang out! They halted, petrified, as villagers scattered wildly in all directions. At the other end of the street, yellow uniformed Japs came charging. Da-shwey wheeled the roan around and dug in his heels. He galloped back to the entrance of the village and ran right through another gang of Japs, who were howling unintelligibly. They hastily poured a wild volley after the flying horse, but their shots went wide of their mark. Leaning low on the roan's lathered neck, Da-shwey drew his pistol and returned their fire. The Japs scurried for cover. By the time they had gathered their wits, he was several hundred yards away. The Japs gave chase, but being on foot, were quickly out-distanced. Their quarry was soon completely obscured by a long trail of smoky dust churned by the hoofs of the running horse on top of the dyke.

That day, the Japs had drawn the guerrillas off by a feint to the west and then thrust directly into the village of Hsye Liu. They murdered and pillaged. Discovering that a marriage was about to take place, they grabbed the bride. First, she was raped by the Japs platoon leader, Iino. Then, many other Japs . . .

In the early hours before dawn, a tousled, bedraggled, young girl crept to a well. She sobbed heartbrokenly for a few minutes, then plunged in, head first! It was Hwar, another victim in the war of resistance!

Chapter VI

Eagle Feather Squadron — 1940 - 1941

Da-shwey's father almost went mad with grief at the disastrous outcome of the intended marriage. For several months he couldn't leave his bed. Some Japs had stopped the bright sedan chair in which Twur's mother was riding, thinking it contained the bride. When a little wrinkled old lady stepped out, the Japs laughed raucously, then broke her ribs with vicious thrusts of their rifle butts.

That day the Japs occupied the village of Hsye Liu. They repaired its ancient fortress and stationed their own and puppet soldiers in it as a permanent garrison. They made frequent raids on the surrounding villages, and had numerous clashes with guerrillas led by Da-shwey and Twur. Finally, in one very sharp encounter the Japs were decisively beaten. They withdrew to the city, leaving a group of puppets under the command of Gwo to hold the fortress. While Gwo and his men seldom dared to sally out of the village, neither were the guerrillas able to take the puppet stronghold.

On October 10, 1940, the Communist Party promulgated the Double Tenth Political Program. Blacky Tsay sent a copy of it to the former mayor Shen, who was still living in the Jap occupied city. He also enclosed a letter inviting him to return to his native village of Shenjya. Shen had been spending far too much money in the city, and besides was homesick. Pondering over the Program for several days, he found that it specifically set forth a workable basis for solidarity among all classes, including the landlords. It proposed a united front against the Japs and traitors. He realized that there was no real reason for his leaving home and leading a useless life in the city. He heard that other landlords who had gone back to their villages were in no way molested. He decided that he had been foolish, gathered his belongings and returned to Shenjya.

Da-shwey had been studying Party policy. When he learned that Shen had come back, he went to call on him and explained to him the basic principles of Chairman Mao.

The same day Mey was on her way home to get some warm clothes and to leave the baby with her in-laws. The child had just been weaned; it no longer required her constant personal attention. Passing through the Central Village, she stopped at Da-shwey's office. Told that he had gone to see Shen, she sat and waited for him in the quiet room. Before long, he came in, frowning.

"What's the matter?" asked Mey with a smile. "Did something go wrong in your work?" Da-shwey sighed, hung his dispatch bag on the wall, sat down, but didn't reply. "I hear you just went to Shen's place," said Mey. "Did he say anything to make you angry?"

"Shen came back and found that nothing and no one in his family had been disturbed. He's very happy, and has no complaints."

"Well then, what's bothering you?"

Sunk in gloom, Da-shwey remained silent.

Mey couldn't imagine what was troubling him. "We've been working together for several years. I'm no stranger — you can tell me," she urged.

Da-shwey looked at her. "It's about my marriage," he blurted.

"You're still young," she said gently. "Are you afraid you won't find a 'partner'? That's nothing to worry about."

"It's not that at all! I don't care now if I never get married. . . . It's my father — he can't talk of anything else. . . . When that poor girl died, he became sick and half crazy. Now he's a little better, but whenever I see him he cries, and says — and says . . . " Da-shwey couldn't finish.

"What does he say? Don't tell one half and swallow the rest!"

"Ai! He says life is too cruel. First he wanted me to marry you, and thought it was all arranged. Who knew that it would be like the willow tree and blossom but not bear fruit? Then when Hwar had almost crossed our threshold, there was that terrible calamity. . . . He keeps talking about it, and it's eating at his heart. Sometimes, he raves. . . I'm afraid he won't live much longer!"

Mey stared, oblivious of the child in her arms pulling at her hair. Her feeling for Da-shwey was something she didn't dare let herself define. She was so lost in a confused warmth that she didn't hear his question although she knew that he had asked one.

She blushed and stammered in embarrassment. "What did you say? . . . The county government will soon make arrangements for elections . . . I came to tell you . . . "

They talked about what they had been doing since their last meeting, then Mey undid a cloth bundle, and took out a pair of cloth shoes.

"You run around so — your shoes are open at the toes like a tiger's mouth — really disgraceful!" she said severely. "I didn't know your size. . . . Try them on and see if they fit."

Da-shwey slipped on the new shoes. He smiled at her fondly. "They're beautiful, . . . just right! You're too . . . "

Mey's eyes were moist, and her heart ached. "Don't talk like that — they're not much," she said with forced lightness. "From now on if anything needs sewing or mending, give it to me, and I'll find time somehow to fix it."

It was after dusk when Mey left with the baby.

*

Elections were held throughout the "border area" — a region consisting of several provinces containing millions of people. The Japanese had occupied the cities, some of the big market towns, and, during the day, controlled the main arteries of transportation. At night, they seldom dared to venture out. Puppet troops held some of the villages. But the vast majority of the people, though subject to constant raids and persecution by the Japs and their puppets, were gradually organizing an increasingly stronger resistance movement, and laying the foundations of democratic government, under the leadership of the Communists.

Every person and every class voted in the elections. Even landlords like Shen were allowed to vote. The people chose whomever they wished. Administrative officers were elected on all levels of government, from village, to district, to county, right up to the highest ranking officials in the border region. The only restriction imposed was that Communist Party members could not comprise more than one-third of the administration.

Blacky Tsay became a member of the county government. Mey was chosen to be chairman of the district Women's Association. Da-shwey was elected leader of the district militia, which formerly had been a guerrilla organization, and now was to operate as a full time military unit. It was composed of hundreds of peasants within the district. Its members continued to tend their fields, but kept their rifles close at hand, and were always ready on call.

As leader of the district militia, the area of Da-shwey's responsibility was wider than before, and he was busier than ever. In the spring of 1941, he was confronted with a problem for which he had no precedent in his experience as a guerrilla. The district included Bayang Lake, on the opposite shore of which was a port called Lake Harbor. The Japs used small steamboats to shuttle between there and the Jap held towns on the near side. They would commandeer the catch of any fisherman they came across, the cargo of peasants' barges, flocks of domestic ducks — it got so that all commerce on the lake had come to a virtual standstill.

Da-shwey called a meeting of the militia and the villagers to discuss what to do about the steamboats. His brother, Ru, now sixteen and a member of the militia, was itching with excitement at the prospect of attacking a steamer.

He suddenly had an idea. "Brother, I have a fine plan!" he burst forth.

"We're holding a meeting — what's this 'brother' business?" said Da-shwey sternly. Everybody laughed.

Ru gulped but persisted. "If I can't call you brother, then I'll say — Mr. Chairman I want to offer a suggestion. . . ."

"All right, let's hear it, but remember this is a serious affair, and you shouldn't be fooling."

"Certainly I'm not fooling," said Ru indignantly. "My idea is this — our rifles are single shots — if we don't hit the Japs on the ship with the first volley, we'll be in trouble. We should get up close and blast them with shotguns, that would fix the bastards! — that's my idea."

"The idea sounds all right," said one of the militiamen approvingly.

"I think if we used a few dozen shotguns and all fired together, we could finish every one of them," added a fisherman named Jow.

"I don't know," said Jumpy dubiously. "Our old shotguns often misfire. . . ."

Da-shwey thought a minute, then said, "The idea isn't bad. We'll give it a try, but also use pistols and rifles in addition to the shotguns."

Further details of the plan of attack were worked out and the meeting adjourned.

It was arranged to attack that very afternoon, when the steamer would be making its return trip to Lake Harbor. The men set out in twenty small boats which ordinarily were used for hunting wild ducks and geese. In single file, the light boats skimmed the surface of the water, oars working in unison, like the beating wings of a soaring eagle. The boats soon glided into a growth of reeds, high as a man, in a shallow section along the shore. The reeds were not wild but cultivated for making mats and baskets, and they covered a wide area of the lake shallows, which were criss-crossed with canals. In these canals, the boats were completely invisible from the lake. Each boat contained two shotguns, primed and loaded. These antique fowling pieces had no triggers, and fuses were inserted in readiness to be ignited when the time came to fire. The men waited in silence.

The sun was beginning to set when hoarse toots of the steamboat's whistle heralded its approach from the west.

"It's coming," said Da-shwey. "Get ready!"

As the steamboat hove into view, the men trained their shotguns on the Japs on its deck, and slowly swung them in pace with the movement of the ship. . . . One hundred . . . fifty . . . twenty yards away . . ., then directly opposite!

"Fire!" cried Da-shwey.

Forty shotguns roared in unison like a clap of thunder, belching a dense black cloud of smoke that obscured everything. But the chugging of the steamer's engine still could be plainly heard!

"That's strange," said Ru. "I don't understand. If the Japs aren't dead why don't they either return our fire or run away?"

"Be quiet," hissed Da-shwey. "Watch!"

As the smoke lifted, they saw the small steamer traveling in a circle, still directly opposite them, but not a Jap was visible.

"I'm going to have a look," said Jow the fisherman.

With a knife in his belt, he plunged into the lake and swam under water toward the ship. Just then, it stopped circling, and began to sail away in the direction of Lake Harbor. The flotilla of small boats swept out in pursuit. The men raised their rifles but had to hold their fire — when Jow's head bobbed up beside the steamboat. The slim fisherman grasped the gunwales and looked around — there crouched in the stern was a Jap aiming at the approaching militiamen!

Jow heaved himself out of the water, bounded across the deck with a cat-like leap, and plunged his knife into the Jap's back. Another thrust — and the Jap sprawled lifeless at his feet.

Jow picked his way across the bodies of nearly a dozen Japs, from whom whole chunks had been torn by the concerted shotgun blasts. He reached the engine, and after fruitlessly pulling and pushing the array of controls, shouted to the militiamen straining at the oars of the small boats, "Hurry up! I can't work this thing. Don't let it get away!"

The men rowed with all their might, but the distance between them and the steamer gradually widened. Jow frantically kept yanking at the controls, to no avail. He stood up and waved both hands as though he would pull the little boats closer through the thin air.

"Faster, faster! Mother's — ! Put your backs to it!" he howled.

Weaving crazily, the steamboat plunged into the reeds. It was still bucking slowly forward when the militiamen clambered aboard and switched off the engine.

The deck was wet and slippery with the blood, and more was still oozing from the gaping wounds of dead Japs. The men collected the guns and ammunition and dumped the bodies into the lake. Ru looked at the ship in wonder.

"How are we ever going to get this thing home?" he asked.

It was made of sailcloth canvas stretched over an iron frame and had a wooden deck. Da-shwey remembered he had heard somewhere that this kind of ship was assembled in sections. He searched around until he found a couple of pairs of pliers. The men all set to work opening bolts. Piece by piece they loaded the sections of the ship on to the small boats. The job completed; the militiamen headed for home.

"Row close to shore," said Da-shwey, "and let the people see."

His boat was in the lead. Behind it stretched the rest of the flotilla in a V-formation. Happy with their victory, the men made their small craft fairly fly, and twenty prows carved swiftly through the water. The peasants and fisherfolk of all the lake front villages lined the shore. An old man with a long white beard (one of the enlightened gentry who had recently been elected to the county senate) pointed proudly at the flotilla.

"Ha! You see — a beautiful sight — Like an eagle feather!"

That struck the peasants' fancy; they smiled and nodded. "An Eagle Feather Squadron — just right!"

And from that day on, that was how the district militia was known.

One of the cadres working with Mey in the district Women's Association was a girl named Nyur. The two girls became good friends. They heard that the Eagle Feather Squadron was preparing to attack another steamboat and wanted very much to go along.

When they suggested it to Da-shwey he only laughed and said, "This isn't like going to a temple fair — it's war. You'd better stay home."

Very put out at this the girls secretly decided to go anyhow. "We'll follow them in our own boat and pretend to gather water chestnuts," said Mey. "Then we can see the whole thing!"

That afternoon, the Eagle Feather Squadron set out. Having learned that the Japs would come in two steamboats with about ten men on each, the militiamen prepared an ambush at a section of the lake where there were reeds along both shores. The men split into two groups. One, headed by Da-shwey, hid near the south bank; the other, led by Jow the fisherman hid diagonally opposite near the north shore. It was arranged that Da-shwey's men would shoot at the leading ship; Jow's men would fire on the second. All the men were equipped with especially good shotguns, which they checked and loaded. The guns, several feet long, had to be supported when fired but carried a tremendous charge.

A soft summer breeze rustled the delicate reeds which perfumed the air with a fragrant fresh green odor. To the east a sea of lotus flowers, all fully open to welcome the warmth of the sun, waved and danced. A small boat, with two girls, glided among the lotus along the north shore — it looked like Mey and Nyur.

"Those dumb girls," fumed Da-shwey. "I told them not to come. A lot of good it did!" He shot his boat over after them, but they were hidden deep in the lotus, keeping very still, and he couldn't find them.

"What do you females mean by coming here and upsetting everything? If you don't leave at once, we're going to fire!" he roared threateningly.

Nyur poked her head out. "We're gathering water chestnuts. Why should that disturb you?" she said in a small defiant voice.

Da-shwey shook his finger at her. "You little trouble-making minx, what kind of a game is this? If you don't go, we'll make it hot for both of you when we get back!"

"All right, we're going, we're going!" said Nyur hastily, and disappeared.

Some of the men had rowed over in their boats to see what was going on.

"What do you want?" Da-shwey snapped at them. "Get back and hide in the reeds!"

Ru grinned mischievously. "Reporting to the Commander — the sun is high and it's still early. How about letting us go in for a swim?"

"Did you come here to fight or to play?" asked Da-shwey with a frown.

"The Jap ships passed here only about an hour ago," said Jow the fisherman, smiling. "They won't be coming back for some time. The weather is so hot — why not let them have their swim?"

Da-shwey didn't say anything further. His brother, taking his silence for consent plunged into the lake with a large splash. The other men stripped to the waist and followed suit. Although he would have liked nothing better,

Da-shwey didn't join them. Instead he plucked a large lotus leaf and fanned himself, keeping his eyes riveted on the west for the Jap ships.

Ru, treading water, wiped the drops from his face with his hand. "Let's have a race and see who can swim the fastest!" he challenged. He struck out across the open water, arms and feet threshing wildly.

Several men took after him, some swimming overhand, some side-stroke. Jow the slim fisherman started last, but swimming breast stroke, his legs kicking like a frog, he passed all the others and began to overtake Ru, while the spectators cheered and shouted. Da-shwey happened to glance into the mass of lotus flowers, and noticed two heads sticking out — Mey and Nyur again, watching the race!

"You still haven't left!" he yelled. "The Japs will be here soon, and it'll be very dangerous. Go on, go back!"

Mey laughingly assented, and the two girls rowed away.

Da-shwey felt the time was getting short. He summoned all the men back. The boats again melted out of sight among the reeds and the surface of the water was again placid and silent. Two green-headed ducks floated smoothly on the lake, stretched their necks forward and took off with a whirring beat of wings. They circled briefly, squawking in rebuke at the hidden men, then flew west, their green tufted heads shining like burnished gold in the sun.

*

Time seemed to drag interminably. There was no sign of the steamboats. The weather changed — dark clouds gathered ominously, covering half the sky. The reeds bowed away from the pressure of a moaning wind. The men were worried that rain would soak their powder and they wouldn't be able to fire the shotguns. Some thought that the steamers weren't coming, and wanted to go home, but Da-shwey insisted that they continue to wait.

At last the chugging of the steamboat engines could be heard approaching.

"Quick, get ready!" called Da-shwey. He gave a signal to the men diagonally opposite.

The militiamen began striking matches to light the punks which would be used to ignite the fuses of the shotguns, but fierce gusts of wind blew out the matches before they had a chance to flare. Fumbling in their haste, groups of men huddled together, and shielding the flames with their bodies, finally managed to light the punks. The sound of the steamboats grew louder, and soon they appeared on the horizon. They moved steadily toward the militiamen's ambush.

The wind grew stronger, and large drops of rain began to fall. The men stripped and covered the punks, fuses and breeches of their guns with their clothes and with their wide straw hats. The two tiger-yellow steamboats were plainly visible now; Japs could be seen taking shelter from the rain on the stern of the ships under green sailcloth canopies. The first ship was towing a barge fully loaded. In the crow's nest on the tall mast of the ship sat a Jap, peering forward through a telescope.

Now the leading ship was almost directly opposite Da-shwey's men; the second ship was nearing Jow's group. The Jap in the crow's nest who had been straining his eyes at the distance, glanced down at the nearby shore and found himself looking into the muzzle of Da-shwey's rifle. Terrified, he embraced the

mast like a monkey on a stick, but before he had a chance to cry out, Da-shwey shot him through the heart. The Jap pitched over backwards, and with feet pointing heavenward, plummeted to the deck.

The two batteries of shotguns opened with an ear-splitting volley from both shores. Nothing could be seen in the dense pall of black smoke that hung over the water, but the second ship could be heard crashing into the south bank, out of commission, her engine silent. The first ship was still running, and countered with machine gun fire which swept through the reeds off the south shore where Da-shwey and his group were concealed. Some of the small boats were hit and began to sink. Leaving the long heavy shotguns behind, the men jumped into the shallow water. Holding their rifles above their heads, they waded further back into the reeds. Jow and his men, off the north shore, rowed their boats out of sight, deep into the maze of canals.

The wind whisked away the curtain of smoke and pushed back the rumbling thunder clouds to again reveal clear skies. Still spitting machine gun fire, the remaining Jap ship advanced on the boats which Da-shwey's men had abandoned. The Japs had never seen the long shotguns before. Chattering excitedly, they transferred them to their own ship.

Hiding among the lotus, further down the north shore, the two girls, Mey and Nyur, could see nothing of what was going on. After a long period of silence, Nyur became impatient.

"The Japs must be all dead," she said. "Let's go out and take a look."

"We better not," cautioned Mey. "That was a machine gun a little while ago. We still don't know what's what."

"Let's just watch from a distance. We won't know what's happening unless we look. We can't stay here forever."

The girls no sooner rowed their boat to the fringes of the open lake, then the Japs discovered them and swiftly bore down on them with the steamer. Frightened pale, the girls frantically rowed back into the lotus and pulled with all their might for the reeds. Now the steamer was almost on top of them! Suddenly, rifles cracked and the Jap machine gunner crumpled at his post! All over the ship, Japs pitched and fell dead to the deck! Two wounded soldiers hysterically jumped into the water and drowned!

After the Jap ship had charged their boats at the south shore, Da-shwey and his men had left the reeds and circled around to the lotus section of the lake. Covering their heads with broad lotus leaves and blending in perfect camouflage with the lotus flowers, the men had waded further up the lake. The Jap ship had pursued the girls to within five yards of where the men were hiding when the guerillas opened fire. At the same time, Jow's group had rowed out again from the reeds off the Japs' stern, and let go with their rifles. The effect of the cross-fire was devastating; not a single Jap was left alive on the ship.

The wind changed and brought back the rain which pelted down in ever increasing fury. Amid crashing thunder, the storm drove the reeds almost level with the water. Big pearly drops rolled crazily on the surface of the slick flat lotus leaves. The lake was whipped with choppy waves and seemed to be one misty piece with the cascading downpour of rain. Soaked to the skin, the girls cheerfully worked with the militiamen in destroying one of the Jap ships and collecting the trophies of war.

It was already night when the little boats started struggling homeward in the teeth of the gale, with the other Jap ship in tow. Nothing could be seen in the pitch dark; even the creaking oars and the shouts of the men were blotted out by the howling wind and rain. A glaring bolt of lightning, crackling vicious and close, startled them into involuntary trembling, and made the relapsing darkness seem even blacker.

"Stay close, Mey," cried Da-shwey. "If you miss us you'll never get back!"

"We're right behind you," screamed Mey. "We won't lose you!" The second half of her words was torn away by the wind, and thunder shook the heavens. . . .

Chapter VII

A Gold Chain — Summer, 1941

As a result of her prolonged exposure to the storm, Mey had to stay in bed with a bad cold. The evening of the next day, the men of the militia came to call on her, bringing two big cans of cookies which they had found aboard one of the Jap ships. She was alone, as Nyur had already gone to work in the countryside.

Da-shwey chuckled as he made a mock formal presentation. "Madam Chairman of the Women's Association, we offer these to comfort you so that you won't have to eat coarse corn muffins!" He placed the bright red colored cans beside her pillow.

"Aiya!" laughed Mey. "These are your spoils of victory. How do I dare eat such things?"

"That's no way to talk," chided Jow the fisherman. "You girls were a great help; we all want you to have them."

"If it hadn't been for your drawing the enemy after you," added Jumpy Ma, "we might not have won, and would have lost our long shotguns besides."

Mey set aside one of the cans for Nyur, and opened the other and passed it around, inviting the militiamen to help themselves.

Ru smacked his lips and screwed up his face in exaggerated bliss. "Ha, not bad! So sweet — it makes my head swim!"

Everyone laughed. They sat talking genially until it was time for the militiamen to return to their quarters.

"You fellows go ahead," said Da-shwey. "I'll be with you as soon as I've boiled some medicine for Mey."

After the men left, he heated enough home remedy medicine to fill a small bowl. "Drink it while it's hot," he said, handing the medicine to Mey. "It'll make you sweat out your cold."

Just then, Jinlung burst in the door. Da-shwey started in surprise. He hastily placed the bowl on the edge of the *kang* and greeted Jinlung with a weak attempt at heartiness, which drew a very cold, perfunctory response.

"You must be tired," said Da-shwey, embarrassed. "I'd better be going."

"Thanks for fixing the medicine for me," said Mey. "Sorry to be so much trouble."

"We're all comrades — no trouble at all," replied Da-shwey, and he took his leave.

Jinlung lay down on the other end of the *kang* and covered himself with a quilt. He propped his head on the bed roll which he had brought home with him. As he lit a cigarette, Mey sat up to drink the medicine.

"Why did you bring your bedding back?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't I? I'm sick," he retorted.

He didn't look the least bit sick to Mey, but she merely asked, "Did you get permission?"

Jinlung took a long drag at his cigarette. "I told them," he said curtly.

"How many days off will you take?"

"That's hard to say," replied Jinlung carelessly. "We'll see how I feel when I get better. 'The frog rests after every jump.' I have to relax for a couple of days, at least."

So, thought Mey, the worthless loafer has been "pounding his mushroom" again and getting in everyone's hair! She angrily set the bowl down on the window sill, covered her head with her quilt and went to sleep.

The next day, Shwang arrived from the county government and told Mey privately that Jinlung had behaved very badly in the militia. He worked only when he felt like it; if anything didn't suit him, he complained and grumbled. Convinced that the world revolved around him, Jinlung was unable to adjust himself to the simple life. The other night at dinner, he didn't like the food, and he cursed and abused the cook in front of everyone. Then, in a rage, he told Blacky Tsay he was going, and rolled up his bedding and left.

"Blacky wants you to try and persuade him to stay in the organization," said Shwang. "Jinlung is a good military man if we can get him to work at it. If he refuses to return to the county, keep him here with you for a while, and find him a job in the district militia."

Mey thought for a long time, her brow wrinkled in a frown. "Ai, that one!" she sighed. "I don't know what to do with him!"

With an encouraging smile Shwang patted her shoulder. "The pus can be drawn out with a good poultice."

Mey shook her head. "I'm afraid the poultice won't stick on the skin of a dog! Anyhow, I'll try and talk to him."

She argued with Jinlung for several days, now softly, now harshly, now with threats, now with cajolery, until he reluctantly gave in.

"All right, I'll work here in the district — but it's only for your sake!"

He was appointed a lieutenant in the district militia.

*

Jinlung had nothing but contempt for his military superior Da-shwey. He hated to take orders and always wanted to run the show himself. One day,

Da-shwey told him that the district militia had been directed to capture and destroy the fortress in the village of Hsye Liu, and that he was about to call a meeting to discuss a plan of attack.

"There's nothing to discuss," said Jinlung breezily. "Just let me and my squad handle it and the job will be done."

Da-shwey was dubious though still polite. "We'd be much stronger if we all went at it. . . . "

"Well then, do it without me, if that's how you feel about it!" snapped Jinlung surlily. "It'll only be one man less, and you'll never miss me!"

Da-shwey was becoming increasingly annoyed at Jinlung's stubborn refusal to cooperate, but he held his temper. Scowling, he went to summon the other cadres for the meeting.

Jinlung lay down on his *kang*, his shrewd brain pondering. At dusk he rose, and dressed in his best satin jacket and trousers. He cocked a fine formal hat over one eye, tucked a pistol in his belt, then summoned his squad of about ten men. They strolled down to the lake, got into a boat, and stealthily rowed to a thicket of reeds along the shore, near the village of Hsye Liu. Here, Jinlung got out. He told the men to stay under cover and wait. Boldly, he walked to the finest restaurant in town. There he engaged a small private dining room and ordered a good meal.

"First prepare the food well," he said to the waiter, in a lordly manner, "but before you serve it, I want you to go to the fortress and invite my good friend Lyew to join me. Tell him that a gentleman is waiting here to have dinner with him. See to it that he comes and I'll give you a larger tip."

The waiter fawningly assured the "gentleman" that his will would be done and bowed himself out.

In a short time, he reappeared with Lyew, who expressed pleased surprise at seeing Jinlung.

"I thought we should have a few drinks together," said Jinlung, smiling amiably. "It's not right for two old friends like us not to see one another for so long. . . . "

The waiter served the food and wine. After he withdrew, Lyew leaned close to Jinlung confidentially. "Is it true what I hear — that you're working for *them*?" He held up two fingers representing the number "eight", meaning Eighth Route Army or Ba Lu.

"Nonsense!" laughed Jinlung. "I'm doing a small trading business. How are things here with you?"

"Ai, don't ask!" sighed Lyew. "You know what Gwo is like — black hands and cruel heart. Any loot we grab disappears like a fart under the bedding! Swallowed up! Mother's — ! I don't even see a hair of it! The other day he made a small fortune. Nabbed a merchant and accused him of doing smuggling to the Ba Lu. Shook him down for a couple of dozen bolts of satin. Now where are they? Huh, does he think we don't know!"

"Nobody ever got any good out of that bastard's brat," said Jinlung coldly.

"That time I caught a man whose bicycle license was past date. . . . Gwo saw it and asked me to let him try it. Mother's — ! He rode off and came back without it! It was a beauty — practically new!" said Lyew sadly. The more

he talked, the angrier he became. Fuddled with drink, he clumsily knocked over his wine cup.

Jinlung's expression changed. He raised one eyebrow viciously. "I can fix it so that you can get even with that dog . . . make him cough up everything," he hissed. "I'll see to it that you get the bicycle — what do you think of that?"

"I think it's a beautiful sentiment," said Lyew, his face lighting up. "What's your plan?"

"To tell you the truth," whispered Jinlung, "I'm a captain over there. If we can settle that Gwo, we'll be in very strong with them. We'll be in a position to do big things. You and I are like brothers — we'll share and share alike. You know I'll treat you right!"

Lyew's greedy eyes grew larger as Jinlung talked. Sputtering enthusistically, he cried, "— his grandmother! That suits me fine! I'd like to do a little 'communizing'! How shall we start?"

Jinlung warningly waved him into silence with his chopsticks, for just then the waiter came in with two bowls of noodles. After he left, they worked out a detailed scheme. They were two of a kind and rolled in the same direction like wheels in parallel tracks. When everything was arranged, they left the restaurant and separated.

Lyew went back to the four-storied fortress. At mid-night he took his turn as sentinel on the roof. Two men stood guard during each period. He shared the watch with Syow, whom he readily convinced to join in the plan. When the moon was nearly down, Lyew lit three matches in succession, and was answered by three glows from the other side of the moat. The two puppets quietly let down the drawbridge. Jinlung and his men rushed across and up to the second floor where the puppet troops were sleeping soundly with the lamps still burning. Silently, they collected all the guns. Then Jinlung hurried with Lyew to Gwo's room on the third floor.

It was faintly illuminated by the rays of the dying moon slanting through the window. They could dimly perceive a form wrapped in quilts on the bed. Grinding his teeth in hatred, Jinlung aimed at its head and fired three shots at close range. He flung back the covers and was enraged to find not Gwo, but two bolts of cloth! Still, the cloth was fine satin, and never ones to let such an opportunity go by, Jinlung and Lyew hastily wrapped the cloth around their waists under their jackets before the rest of the squad appeared.

"Mother's — !" swore Jinlung. "He got off cheap!"

He sent the men to guard the prisoners, and ordered Syow to arrange boats for the trip back. While waiting, he and Lyew searched Gwo's room thoroughly. They hid whatever valuables could be concealed on their own persons.

Luckily for Gwo, he had gone to the home of a rich landlord in the village that night to smoke opium. When he heard the shootings in the fortress, his heart raced and his skin twitched violently. He sent someone to investigate. As soon as he learned that the Ba Lu had taken the fortress, he left immediately for the Jap-occupied city.

Early the next morning two boats neared the district government town. One was loaded with prisoners, a bicycle and other battle trophies; the second contained Lyew, Syow, the squad members, the captured guns and Jinlung proudly

sitting in the stern. As they came in sight of their destination, they were met by three small fishing craft, on one of which stood Da-shwey.

"Jinlung, old man, where've you been?" hailed Da-shwey. "We've been looking for you!"

"I just captured the fortress," yelled Jinlung with smug satisfaction. He pointed at the other boat. "That's full of prisoners. And what have you been doing? Fishing, eh?" he sneered.

The boats drew alongside each other. Da-shwey jumped aboard to join Jinlung, whom he greeted with the greatest goodwill. "We were planning to attack the fortress tonight; we were on our way to look over the ground, but you've beaten us to it! You're a good man, Jinlung! How did you do it?"

Jinlung boastfully told his story, then pointing at Lyew and Syow added, "These two helped a lot."

This was the first inkling Da-shwey had that they were not prisoners, but he immediately smiled at them and said, "Fine — working with us is much more honorable. . . ." He handed them his pipe and tobacco pouch.

Lyew offered around his cigarettes, and Syow said affably, "Now we're all one!"

"Did you burn down the fortress?" Da-shwey asked Jinlung.

"Why should we? We got everybody out of it. It doesn't matter whether we burn it or not."

"I think we'd better burn it. The enemy can use it if they come again. You fellows had a hard night — go home and get some rest. We'll take care of it."

Da-shwey jumped back into the fishing boat and rowed off with his men to Hsye Liu. Jinlung and his squad proceeded back to district headquarters.

"What's Da-shwey's rank?" Lyew asked, whispering.

Jinlung sniffed contemptuously. "They call him a captain, but he can't give us any orders!"

After burning the fortress, Da-shwey and the militiamen spent several days in Hsye Liu restoring the people's control of local government and setting up a military organization. When they returned, Jinlung, whose good opinion of himself was now boundless, feared that Da-shwey would hamper his freedom to do what he pleased. On the pretense of starting a guerrilla expedition, he again led part of his squad to the village of Hsye Liu. He carefully picked men who were more or less his own sort. There was not a Party member among them.

Da-shwey didn't like the looks of things. After talking the matter over with Shwang, he several times ordered them to return. The first few orders were unheeded, but finally Jinlung sent back a false report that suspicious enemy movements in the vicinity of the village didn't permit them to leave yet. Da-shwey decided he'd better go to fetch them himself.

He reached the village at dusk, and after making inquiries, went to the small boarding house in which the squad was living. He entered one room which was obviously used for sleeping quarters. The bedding was scattered about in messy disarray. Though guns were hanging on the wall, the door was wide open. He walked into the room opposite, which was also in great disorder, and also unoccupied except for Gulu.

"Want Heaven, Earth, Tiger Head . . . don't want three little Monkeys . . . lend me some more . . . this time, sure to win back!" Gulu was muttering in a drunken dream of gambling.

"Wake up, wake up!" Da-shwey shook him vigorously.

Gulu rolled over into another kind of dream. "Don't hang on me," he simpered. "I'm dead tired!"

And all of Da-shwey's shouting and pummeling couldn't rouse him.

Furious, Da-shwey sought the owner of the boarding house. He asked her where the squad had gone. She looked him over carefully, then said, "You'll find them at Wan's place."

"Who is he? Where does he live?"

"You don't even know Wan? His kind are everywhere! When you go out the door, turn east. Take the first lane on the north side and follow to the end to a small door, and that's it. Whatever you do, don't tell anyone I told you!"

Da-shwey asked her to keep an eye on the rooms which the squad were occupying, then he went to Wan's. Entering the courtyard, he could hear the sound of laughter within the house. He looked through a rip in one of the gauze curtains with which all the windows were covered. In the light of a flickering oil lamp he saw two girls and several men hugging and grabbing gaily on the *kang*.

"Kiss me on the mouth, little hussy!" said Lyew, pulling one of the girls toward him, with one hand on the back of her neck.

"Don't be so rough," she giggled, struggling.

He threw his arms around her, forced her down on the *kang*, and kissed her full on the lips.

Da-shwey shrunk away from the window, his face scarlet with shame. He became aware of several neighbors peering over the wall of the compound to watch the show. Feeling extremely uncomfortable, he entered the house. A strained silence fell on the militiamen at the sight of their leader.

"Where's Jinlung?" he asked.

"Oh, he," replied Lyew casually, "he's busy all the time. We never know where he is."

The other men also professed to know nothing of Jinlung's whereabouts. Da-shwey saw he could get no information from them. As he left, he could hear them snickering.

Angry and disgusted, Da-shwey sought the village mayor. The man knew him and greeted him warmly. When Da-shwey asked about Jinlung, the mayor opened his shirt to reveal two ugly purple bruises on his chest.

"You see — he wanted to give ration tickets for thirty catties of millet to get sixty catties of wheat. Before I had a chance to finish objecting, he smashed me with his rifle butt! I've never seen that kind of a Ba Lu before! He's made our system as worthless as a dog's fart!"

The mayor's father, an old man, stared at his son warningly. "You're talking too much!" Turning to Da-shwey, he said courteously, "Captain, you must have dinner with us."

The mayor, still raging inwardly, kept his peace.

In no mood for eating, Da-shwey asked the mayor where Jinlung spent his time. Again, the old man interrupted.

"He has no definite place. My son doesn't know."

But as Da-shwey was leaving, the mayor saw him to the door. "Every night he goes to the home of the rich landlord, Gow," he whispered. "Who doesn't know that he's sleeping with the landlord's daughter! You go see for yourself. I never met that kind of a Ba Lu before! He's as easy to pick out from the others as a black dung beetle in white flour!"

He gave directions how to reach Gow's house, and Da-shwey set out.

Gow's gatekeeper required considerable persuasion before he would let him enter the compound. At last, Da-shwey crossed the courtyard and stood in the doorway of a brilliantly lighted room. He found richly dressed people absorbed around a mahjong game, but at first he didn't see anyone who looked like Jinlung.

An old scoundrel, seated at the mahjong table, peered at Da-shwey over the top of his spectacles. "What do you want?"

"I'm looking for someone," replied Da-shwey.

At the sound of his voice, the sleek head of a man whose back was toward him, turned around. "Ah, it's you. Come on in." It was Jinlung, dressed up like a silk pole.

"I've got something to say to you," said Da-shwey shortly.

Genially, Jinlung pulled him into a chair, and handed him a cigarette. "Sure, sure! I'll be with you as soon as I finish this round."

A girl sitting next to Jinlung with her left arm draped over his shoulder was crying, "East wind, east wind! That's our trick!" as she snatched up an ivory with her right hand. "Jinlung," she urged him, laughing affectionately, "that's your trump suite — you get double for every trick like that! Pay attention to the game!"

Da-shwey sat and waited, seething with impatience. Servants came in and served bowls of fragrant lotus seed soup. Everyone stopped to eat. Da-shwey felt that his lungs would burst with suppressed rage. He got to his feet. "I don't want any! I'm going!"

Jinlung surveyed him coolly. "All right, you run along. We can talk later on."

Da-shwey stalked out angrily. Without stopping to sleep or eat, the same night he returned to district headquarters and reported to Shwang.

*

Two days later, Jinlung received a letter from Blacky Tsay ordering him to come back with his men at once. "It's that mother's — of a Da-shwey trying to queer me behind my back!" he swore to himself. But the tone of the letter was stern, and his nerve failed him. He returned with the squad to district headquarters.

He went home first to see Mey and find out which way the wind was blowing. "I hear Blacky is in town," he said casually.

"Mm," said Mey, non-commitally, looking at him with veiled eyes.

"Why has he ordered me to come back?" he asked.

"Don't you know?" she replied coldly.

"Yes, I know!" he flared. "It's the work of that Da-shwey! He's jealous that I'm better than he and he wants to ruin me! . . ."

"Don't talk rot!" interrupted Mey. "You can't blame your ugly face on the mirror! Da-shwey isn't like that. He's not like you! I've eaten my heart out talking to you, urging you to be progressive, but you don't learn. . . . You're simply useless!"

"Pei!" He pounded the table savagely. "That scum Da-shwey! What does he know? While I was out capturing the fortress, he was fishing turtles on the lake! He's only good for picking manure! To you he's precious, but I think he stinks too much to let him carry my night pot! Huh, I've known for a long time that you two have been wearing the same pair of pants. That night I came home and found you in bed with him leaning all over you. . . . What was the big secret — tell me!"

Mey was so angry that her whole body trembled. She burst into tears. "Jinlung," she sobbed, "you — you — spit blood on me! You insult me! You go out whoring and then try to blame me for the same thing!"

Jinlung lunged forward and grabbed her by the hair. "Who have I been whoring with?" he howled. "Tell me! Tell me!"

Mey struggled and shouted at him. "You guzzle, swill, whore, gamble . . . dirty the name of the Ba Lu! Everybody knows it!"

Jinlung smashed her in the face. She reeled back against the wall, blood spurting from her nose. As he moved toward her to hit her again, a man rushed in, seized him from behind, and with one powerful heave, sent him spinning to the floor. Jinlung looked up to find that it was Da-shwey. Burning with hatred, he flung himself viciously at his enemy. But just then, Shwang and Blacky Tsay entered running, and tore the two apart.

Panting, his hands on his hips, Da-shwey shouted, "That's fine! You go out to fight, and then come home and fight some more — with a woman!"

"I — your ancestors!" screamed Jinlung, hopping with rage. "What business is it of yours if I want to hit my wife! You mother's — ! What do you mean by stabbing me in the back!"

Blacky and Shwang dragged him out, still raving.

Da-shwey helped Mey up. Her hands and clothes were all stained with blood.

*

Blacky and Shwang talked to Jinlung for hours, but he insisted he was right and wouldn't give an inch. He sat in angry silence, while they continued to try to teach him. Actually he heard nothing of what was being said, because in his mind he was already mulling over a plan of action. At last he stood up.

"Da-shwey says I have this and that wrong with me — I'll show him what kind of a man Jinlung is!" He pounded his chest. "You'll see who's an anti-Jap hero, and who's an empty-talking performing bear!" He strutted out of the door.

In the courtyard he met a man from his native village. The man had brought Jinlung's baby, who was ill. The folks at home naturally thought that its parents would want to take care of it.

"I don't want him! He's not my child," said Jinlung spitefully. "If he's going to die, take him to his mother and let him die there!"

He sought out Lyew. "These people think they're too good for us, that they can push us around," he told him. "We've got to show them a thing or two!"

They conferred for a long time. At nightfall they induced Syow to join in their scheme. Then taking their guns, swiftly, like unbridled wild horses, they left the village.

First they went to Hsye Liu, where after several drinks, they bought a coil of rope and a large knife. Leaving the village, they followed the dyke to the walled market town held by puppet troops. Lyew had been a bandit in this vicinity and knew the town and its surroundings thoroughly. He led them to a point opposite the west wall, far from the sentry towers. They swam the moat, squeezed through a narrow opening in the wall that was concealed by a growth of thorns, and stealthily entered the town.

They walked silently through the narrow quiet streets to the home of the head of the merchants' guild. The big gate of his compound was shut tight. By standing on his croneys' shoulders, Jinlung was able to grasp the top of the compound wall and pull himself up. With the aid of the rope, the others joined him. They then let one another down inside. Crossing the courtyard, they came to an inner wall, the gate of which was also locked securely. This wall was too high to be scaled in the same way as the outer one. There was a tall tree nearby, but its branches didn't reach out far enough. The crafty Jinlung climbed the tree, tied one end of the rope to a strong branch, higher than the top of the wall, and tied the other end around Lyew's waist. Lyew was lifted off the ground, and with a few good heaves was swung up on to the wall. After the end of the rope tied to the tree was unfastened, the other two were hauled up on the wall. Its top was flush with the roof of one of the buildings of the inner courtyard. They crossed the roof and slid down a tall verticle pole used as one of the supports for an awning spread across the courtyard in summer.

Of the buildings which formed the hollow square, only the east and north sides were illuminated. Looking through the window of the east wing, they could see people playing cards. Except for one effete young man, all the players were women. Stationing Lyew outside the door of the east wing, Jinlung and Syow entered the still north room.

The head of the merchants' guild was lying smoking on the *kang*. He sat up, startled.

"Don't be afraid," said Jinlung quickly. "We haven't come to hurt you."

"Who are you?" cried the fat merchant.

"I'm a captain in the Ba Lu. I'm the one who captured the fortress at Hsye Liu. Some of us have decided to wash our hands and quit. We'll give you our guns, but we'd like to borrow a little travel money."

Jinlung placed his pistol on the table and sat down. Syow followed his example.

The fat merchant leader was reassured. "Fine, fine," he smiled. "I have some money here I can give you."

He took a roll of bills out of his pocket and handed it to Jinlung, who counted it.

"There are quite a few of us," said Jinlung. "This won't last us very long. Can't you give us a little more?"

The puffy flesh on Fatty's face quivered. He thought a minute, then pulled out a key. Kneeling on the *kang*, he opened a small door built into the wall.

From its recesses he drew out a jewel box. After fumbling over its contents, the merchant finally extracted a pair of matched rings, one with a red and one with a green stone.

"Here, captain," he said, giving them to Jinlung. "These will find you friends wherever you go. Take both of them."

The instant he turned his back to close the wall safe, Jinlung grabbed him by the throat with two hands, while Syow slipped the rope around his neck and pulled it tight. Fatty's eyeballs protruded; strangling noises came from his throat in a horrifying manner. Syow was trembling with fear, and the rope fell from his shaking hands. Struggling wildly, Fatty rolled off the *kang* to the ground, the rope still trailing from his neck. Jinlung clamped a foot on his chest, seized one end of the rope, handed the other end back to Syow. The two pulled mightily until Fatty's eyes rolled up in his head, his tongue thrust out thick and purple, and his body contracted into a stiff ball. Only then, did Jinlung drop the rope, bound over to the jewel box and tear it open. His eyes gleamed greedily at the sight of a long gold chain. He closed the box and put it in his shirt.

"Knife!" he snapped at Syow.

Syow produced the shining pig-slaughtering blade, but couldn't lift his palsied hand. Jinlung stared at him with burning scorn, snatched the knife, leaned over the still form of the merchant and hacked deep into the fat neck. As he withdrew the blade, blood spurted all over his clothes, but only after he chopped savagely two more times was the head severed from the body. He took a thin coverlet from the bed, placed his gory trophy in the center, tied the four ends together and tucked them under his belt. He blew out the lamp, and trailed by Syow and Lyew, made a hasty getaway through the back door of the courtyard.

When they reached the dyke, they sat down and rested. Jinlung shared the roll of bills equally, in three parts.

"Why don't you give me and Lyew each one of the rings?" wheedled Syow. "You can keep the chain."

Jinlung slapped him hard across the face with his open hand. "Get the hell out of here! You dare lift your eight legs and piss on me! I told you to kill the man and you're scared to move! Where do you come off to want this and want that!"

Syow lapsed into a frightened silence; but Lyew, who was much shrewder, knew how to handle Jinlung.

"Don't be sore, old man," he soothed. "Let's see what you've got."

"You don't want to listen to his dog-farts," said Jinlung. "I've only got two rings. Here, I'll give you one." Lyew took it and was satisfied. Jinlung stood up. "Let's go back now. Cover your arse with a handkerchief so the hole won't show! This has to be kept secret. I don't want anyone to know about our loot!"

They reached district headquarters at sunrise, just as the militiamen were getting up. "Where's Blacky?" asked Jinlung.

Shwang stared at his blood stained clothes. "He didn't sleep here last night," he replied. "Where have you been?"

Jinlung said nothing, but silently undid the bundle at his waist. The men recoiled in horror as the grisly head dropped to the floor and rolled unevenly to a stop at the foot of the *kang*.

"That's the head of the traitor Liu," he crowed, swelling with pride. "I, Jinlung, took it as easily as blowing away a speck of dust — though, as you all know, he lived in a town surrounded by a deep moat and a high wall! Everywhere were Jap sentries with bright searchlights, but did that stop me? Da-shwey is always talking so big — let's see him go in and bring back a head!"

"Which Liu do you mean?" asked Shwang, still wide-eyed.

"Why, the head of the merchants' guild in the market town — a big traitor! Don't you know?"

Shwang felt this was very bad business, but for the moment couldn't think of what to say. He told Jinlung to get some rest and wait for Blacky Tsay who would arrive soon. Jinlung considered himself a great success.

He kicked the head with smug satisfaction. "Be sure and let Blacky see this! Tomorrow we can hang it up in the market place and let the people have a look!" Rewrapping the thing like a precious stone, he swaggered out with it.

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Shwang noticed that one side of Syow's face was swollen where Jinlung had hit him, and called him aside to ask the reason. At first Syow was afraid to talk, but when Shwang guaranteed to protect him, he, full of resentment, poured out the whole story.

On Blacky's arrival, Shwang gave him a report in detail. Blacky said that Jinlung's faults were more serious than he had thought. He immediately summoned him for a private interview.

Jinlung, jauntily arrogant, was taken aback when Blacky said to him with a frown, "Yesterday, you went off with two men without permission. That was wrong. Killing a man is no small affair. It needs the approval of both the district and county governments. You had no right to decide such a thing for yourself."

"What was wrong with my assassinating a traitor?" asked Jinlung, in a hurt tone.

"The head of a merchants' guild isn't necessarily a traitor. Communist policy is first to try to teach and reform that sort of person. We only eliminate them if they're so wicked and rotten that they can't be reformed. Each case has to be weighed carefully, and in any event, no one can go out and kill on his own responsibility!"

Jinlung sat glaring straight ahead, nursing his wounded vanity. Blacky continued to look at him with dissatisfaction, and went on, "Why did you do it? Was it to strike against the Japs, or was it for yourself? . . . Tell me, what loot did you bring back from the town?"

Jinlung's color drained from his face, then rushed back, scarlet. "What do you mean?" he said, trying to brazen it out. "I didn't touch a button! Where did you ever get that idea?"

Blacky was sickened by this oily evasiveness. He kept his temper under control with an effort. "Jinlung," he said patiently, "we're asking not because

we want any part of your treasure, but because we want to straighten out your muddled ideas. Shwang and I talked to you a long time yesterday, but you don't seem to have understood anything we said — in fact you're worse than ever. This thinking only of yourself is bad for the revolution, not good. As to you personally, if you don't correct your faults immediately, they'll get worse every day, and can only end in destroying you!"

Jinlung knew that all was discovered. The first thing that came to his mind was that somehow Da-shwey had exposed him. His resentment kindled into a defensive rage.

"I'm through!" he flared, leaping to his feet. "I risk my life, and still I'm no good! There's something fishy about this for sure, and I know damn well who's attacking me behind my back! If it weren't for your sake, I'd take my gun and kill him right now! Let's open the window and say it for everyone to hear — either Da-shwey goes or I go! What do I need this job for? Anyhow, I won't join the enemy, I won't be a traitor — I'll go home and be a plain citizen!"

He flung his pistol on the table and stamped out the door, almost colliding with Da-shwey who was just coming in. His face flaming wtih rage, Jinlung didn't even glance at him, but continued angrily on his way.

He went straight to his squad room, where he fumed and ranted to such an extent about this "insult" to their honor that the men's resentment was aroused. With Lyew in the lead, they went to Blacky in a group to resign. It took considerable talking on the part of Blacky and some of the district committeemen to convince them that the criticism of Jinlung was more than justified and in no way reflected on the other members of the squad.

Only Lyew insisted on resigning. "I can't eat this bowl of rice," he said. "Let those who want to stay, stay!" He turned in his gun and left.

Mey was at home taking care of her sick baby. She walked up and down with him in her arms, singing softly and patting his thin little body. The infant cried weakly and continuously.

"Look," she said, stopping in front of the mirror. "Who's that?"

The child laughed delightedly at the reflection of his small wizened face. Mey's eyes welled with tears.

She was feeding him an egg she had boiled when Jinlung rushed in, still in a tantrum. "Mey," he shouted, "if you're my wife, you'll roll up our bedding and leave with me now! Otherwise, we split for good!"

Mey started, her eyes becoming as round as little copper bells. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

Jinlung laughed coldly. "I'm neither man nor spirit to them. I'm quitting! If they don't want me, there are plenty of people who do! Resign from your job and go with me, or we're finished!"

"Don't threaten me, Jinlung," said Mey contemptuously, looking him straight in the eye. "If we're through, we're through! There isn't a chance that I'd give up the revolution on your account. Let the horse travel the dirt road and the cart travel the highway — one not interfering with the other!"

"All right!" grated Jinlung. "If you don't recognize me as your husband, then you don't want the baby!" He grabbed the child by the arms and began to pull him away from Mey.

The infant cried with fright as Mey held him tight and said frantically, "He's so sick! You mustn't upset him!"

Jinlung tore the baby from her with a vicious yank that sent Mey sprawling to the ground. His face contorted with hate, he cruelly kicked her several times, then whirled and fled, locking the door behind him. Sobbing, Mey crawled to her feet and beat her fists against the heavy door. Her child's screams grew fainter in the distance.

A few days later, the county government received a letter from Jinlung that a wife should live with her husband; that if Mey wouldn't return to his home, he wanted to divorce her. The authorities asked Mey what was her idea.

"He's shattered my heart," she said bitterly. "That man is crooked — root and stem. He refuses to serve the revolution! I can't live with him, divorce or not. All I want is that he give back my baby. He can only bring the child harm!"

The divorce was granted, but no action was necessary about the baby. The day Jinlung ran off with him, the child caught a severe cold on the road. He died a few days later.

Chapter VIII

Iron Heel — Summer, 1942

During the end of May, the Japs launched an intensive campaign to "mop-up" the Ba Lu and all the people's military forces operating under its direction in Central Hopei. This time the Japs were too strong. They poured in from all sides, aiming at the destruction of major Ba Lu bases. The regular Communist Army shifted to other regions. Local Communist administrative and guerrilla organizations were ordered to go underground.

Meetings of Party members were held everywhere on a county level. The Communists vowed that they would not waver or surrender, that they would stand with the people to the end. It was agreed that the period ahead would be the most difficult one, but that if they could see it through, victory was assured. Throughout the region, grim, solemn groups of men stood and pledged their faith.

The Jap sweep already was reaching toward the smaller villages. Groups of cadres were hastily formed to organize the preservation, concealment and protection of the people's forces. In one such group, Da-shwey, Shwang and Mey returned to district headquarters where they mobilized the people to hide

useful articles and to keep secret the identity of the men and women going underground. Feverishly, the masses and the cadres made the necessary preparations.

The enemy drew nearer. Tunnels were ruled out because there was no place in the Bayang Lake section that you could dig very deep without striking water. Concealed dug-outs were proposed, but no one had any confidence in them. At the last minute the cadres decided to wear the ordinary clothes of the poor peasants and mingle with the crowds which now were moving from one village to the next seeking a place of safety.

The number of the enemy increased. No one knew how many there were or where they were coming from, but transportation on the lakes, on the rivers, on the dykes — all were cut off by Jap patrols. People tried to hide in the wheat fields as the Japs, firing recklessly at anything that moved, surrounded the villages.

One afternoon, the Japs formed a dragnet nearly ten miles in circumference and marched toward its center. The people dashed east only to meet infantry; a rush to the west brought them face to face with advancing cavalry — the Japs were everywhere. Women and children cried, village after village was put to the torch, and the sound of Jap guns became ever louder.

Da-shwey and the other cadres repressed their bitterness as they buried their pistols in the fields and marked the places with stones or clumps of earth. A few moments later, enemy cavalry squeezed the people in the wheat fields into a tight milling knot. Steel-helmeted, leather-booted Jap infantry, and green-uniformed puppet troops, with gleaming bayonets, herded the peasants on to the main road. The men were separated from the women, while machine gunners on all sides crouched over their weapons.

An "interpreter" and another traitor in civilian clothes walked up and down the line of prisoners, asking, "Who is Ba Lu? Who is a Communist? Point them out!"

No response.

"Who is a cadre? Who is a guerrilla?"

Still no answer.

"We know this place is a nest of anti-Japanese," snapped a traitor in a white shirt, "and we're going to find them!"

Impatiently a Jap officer, with a puppet at his side, personally checked over the men prisoners, one by one. He looked at their hands, felt their leg muscles and pulled several peasants out of the line. Mey recognized some of them; others, she didn't know. Before long, Twur, the old Manchurian captain and Da-shwey were all dragged forward. Mey's heart began to pound.

Then the selection of women for "entertainment" started. When they reached Mey, one of the traitors said, "She's a beauty! Don't let her dirty face fool you. She's smeared it with black from a pot!" They pushed her to join the group of girls huddled together.

The sun was setting. The Japs picked out five of the seized men, including Twur and the old captain, tied their hands securely behind their backs and shoved them into the field. Traitors produced shovels and ordered the peasants to dig a pit. When they refused, they were clubbed and beaten unmercifully until they complied.

The first victim dragged to the edge of the pit was only a boy, white as death, crying and struggling against his bonds.

The peasants sobbed aloud in helpless grief. "He's a youngster!" they pleaded. "Let him go!"

The Japs kicked him into the pit.

The next was the old captain, his lips a thin line as he stared contemptuously at the Japs. He walked calmly toward the pit. Just before he reached the edge, he whirled and kicked one of the Jap soldiers in the groin with all his might. The Jap dropped to the ground fainting with pain. Other enemy soldiers rushed the old captain, jabbed him with their bayonets, and threw him into the open grave.

Fuming, the Japs and traitors threw two more men into the pit, and then dragged forward Twur, the fifth and last. Kicking and struggling, he roared curses at the enemy.

"I — your grandmothers! You can't kill enough Chinese! Sooner or later you're going to die! . . . " They pushed him in with the others, but he continued to revile them. The people began to stir.

The traitors hastily ordered the peasants to start shoveling, but nobody moved. They grabbed the shovels themselves and smothered the cries of the victims with heaps of earth. Heedless of the people's tearful pleas, they stamped hard the horrid mound.

A bugle sounded. The Japs marched away with the remaining prisoners.

The moment they were out of sight, the people ripped open the mound with their bare hands. The first man uncovered was dead; the next — also dead. . . . All five were purple with suffocation from head to foot.

Oh, the heart-rending crying and lamentation! Desperately, the people scooped dirt from mouths and nostrils with their fingers.

Tears running down his face, Shwang steadily pumped Twur's arms. Gradually he came to life.

Two others were revived, but the boy and the old captain couldn't be saved.

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The prisoners were marched down the road, the men in the lead and the women following. They were tied together in groups of six, with Jap soldiers and traitors between each group. The men's hands were bound behind them, they staggered under the weight of the knapsacks which the Japs had put on their backs. The straps of the bags, slung around the prisoners' necks, half throttled them.

Da-shwey, burdened with a couple of cartridge belts in addition to a big knapsack, could barely breathe for the pressure on his throat. He gradually managed to burrow his chin under the knapsack strap, work it into his mouth, and grip it with his teeth. As he plodded along, he thought of Twur and the old captain. His eyes were blinded with hot tears. He tried to turn his head to look back at Mey, but a heavy Jap boot kicked him forward.

Passing cavalry columns choked the prisoners with dust. The only way they could wipe away their dripping sweat and running noses was to lean forward and rub their faces against a raised knee.

Ai! thought Da-shwey. They're sitting on our necks and can do anything they please. What kind of a mother's — world is this! Chairman Mao says that the anti-Jap war must go through three stages, and then we'll have victory. But how long do we have to suffer? The Japs are as many as grass-hoppers. . . . I know we'll win in the end. . . . I'm only afraid I won't live to see it!

As they passed through a small village, they saw a group of naked women cowering under some willow trees. Fifty yards away, a Jap soldier stood on a mound holding a pair of trousers on the end of his rifle. He shouted something and waved his hand. The women all ran toward him and scrambled for the trousers, which he held as high as he could, laughing uproariously.

In another village, there were more stripped women surrounded by a big circle of Japs. In the center was a traitor, with a few sets of clothing hanging over his shoulder. He was holding a couple of chickens. They could hear his high-pitched voice shouting, "Whoever catches them, gets the clothes!" He flung the chickens from him and the Japs rocked with joy at the sight of the nude women stumbling and clutching in wild pursuit.

Mey, burning with humiliation, turned her head the other way. She could hear women screaming in the village in a way that made her flesh creep. I've got to get out of this, she thought, as a chill of panic ran through her bones. But how? Straining her wrists against her ropes, she was surprised to feel them give a little. She pulled and tugged until they were loose enough to slip off, but she kept her hands behind her back and showed no change of expression.

Night found them marching through the narrow winding street of a little village. The traitor guarding Mey's group had just turned the corner. The next group of prisoners had fallen behind, out of sight. Mey worked her hands free and dashed off the road into a public privy, where she crouched in a corner, temples throbbing.

She didn't stir for several hours after the procession of prisoners had gone by, for she could still hear the shouts and laughter of the Japs and the dull thud-thud of their boots. She was afraid that soldiers were billeted in the village, but she knew she couldn't hide in the privy indefinitely. Mey waited until things quieted down a little, then gathering her courage, she slipped back into the street. Hugging the wall and moving silently in the shadows, she left the village and lost herself in the dark open fields.

After a while, exhausted, she sat down and rested. She had no idea where she was in the pitch black night. Frightened and alone, Mey wept. She worried about Da-shwey and thought of the men buried alive. . . .

Mey wandered through the deserted fields all night and all the next day without eating. Pangs of hunger knawed at her vitals. Late in the afternoon, she came to a village. After cautiously circling it and finding it completely quiet, she stole in. The main street was littered with empty cans, the bones of pigs and chickens. Plucked feathers stirred gracefully in the summer breeze. On all sides were burnt, collapsing houses. From some, whisps of smoke were still rising. An acrid, charred smell assailed the nostrils. Here and there small pools of blood could be seen, not quite dry. . . . Sickened, Mey hurried from the scene of carnage into a side lane. She knocked lightly on the door of the first whole house she came to.

A woman about forty peered through a crack in the door. Seeing that it was only a lone girl, she let her in. The woman offered a couple of corn muffins and some boiled water. Mey thought she had never tasted anything so good. While still munching avidly, Mey asked about the Japs.

The woman shook her head. "They came early this morning," she sighed, "and didn't leave 'til afternoon. It was horrible! They rounded us all up and said any family hiding a Ba Lu must give him up, or the whole family would lose their heads and their house would be burned. Ai! Ai! Three were killed right on the main street, and two heads were cut off not far from here! Then our neighbor's little boy — only two years old, and such a good child — a Jap grabbed his feet and tore him in half to the neck! So much blood! I don't know what to do! There's no place to run to, but I'm scared to death to stay here!"

Hungry as she had been, Mey was too revolted to eat any more. The two women sat silent for a moment, sunk in misery. Then Mey forcibly shook off her black mood.

"We'll see it through," she comforted the other woman. "Once this stage is passed, things will take a turn for the better."

The woman immediately suspected her of being a cadre. She became panic-stricken. "This place isn't safe for you!" she cried. "Finish your muffins quickly and go!"

"But the enemy is everywhere," pleaded Mey. "Where can I go? As long as I'm here, you must at least let me spend the night! All of our work is for the people — people like you! If anybody comes, just say that I'm your niece from another village. I promise nothing will happen!"

The woman was moved, but she was badly frightened. She wavered on the edge of a decision.

"We fighters and the people are all one family," said Mey with tears in her eyes. "How can you let me fall into the enemy's cruel grasp?"

"Don't talk like that!" begged the woman putting her hands on Mey's shoulders in a motherly gesture. "I can't stand it! Of course you can stay here!" She said that her son was away from home, her daughter-in-law had returned to her own village, and that aside from her husband they were alone in the house.

Suddenly they heard the measured tramp of many feet and the sound of heavy wheels rolling over the cobblestones in the street. The woman ran out and bolted the compound gate. She returned pale and breathless.

"The Japs have come back!" she panted. "Into that room, quick!"

She shoved Mey into the next room, told her to lie down on the *kang*, and covered her with a tattered old quilt. Moving with surprising speed on her small bound feet, she rushed out the room for a ladleful of dirty water, which she sloshed around the floor next to the *kang*, then flung handfuls of ashes into the puddles. She put a battered tea pot and a chipped bowl besides Mey's pillow, and placed a pair of foul-smelling old shoes at the foot of the *kang*.

They could hear pounding on a neighbor's door and men's voices shouting and swearing. The husband, who had just been with the neighbor, had climbed the party wall to come home when the noise started.

"They're making a house-to-house check!" he announced breathlessly as he entered the bedroom. Then he saw Mey and his mouth fell open in surprise.

"What are you doing here?" When she didn't answer, he stamped his feet in despair. "Get out of here, quick! Do you want to bring calamity on our heads?" he hissed. "They'll burn and murder — don't you know that!"

Mey sat up, her eyes brimming with tears. Before she could reply, curses and the boom of heavy kicks against their compound door raised a terrific clamor. "Mother whore's —, who locked this door? Don't you want to live?" shouted a raucous voice.

The woman pushed her husband aside. Forcing Mey back down on the *kang*, she covered her with the old quilt from head to foot.

The pounding outside continued, followed by a splintering and a crash that meant the door was down. Eight Japs and traitors barged into the room, loudly accusing the couple of harboring Ba Lu. Not daring to peek out of the quilt, Mey could hear furniture smashing. She trembled violently with fear that the husband would give her away. What are you shaking for? If you're going to die, then you'll die! Mey said fiercely to herself. Immediately she became icy calm.

"We're only farmers. What do we know about Ba Lu?" she could hear the husband protesting.

The Japs demanded money from him and beat him when he couldn't produce it. Then they moved toward the *kang* yelling "Ba Lu, Ba Lu!"

The woman feigned deafness. "I don't understand," she shouted. "What do you want?"

The Jap leader looked at the smelly shoes and the filth around the *kang*. "What's that?" he demanded, pointing at the ragged bundle that contained Mey.

"My niece," roared the woman. "She's sick. . . . Hasn't eaten anything for days . . . just had some medicine!"

"Ba Lu!" insisted the Jap. He tried to flip open the covers with his bayonet, but Mey held them tight from the inside. A traitor stepped forward, ripped the quilt off with his hand, and threw it to one side.

"Put it back!" pleaded the woman. "She's just had medicine! She'll catch a chill!"

The traitor yanked the pillow from under Mey's head and flung it on the floor. Mey kept her wits, coughed weakly and closed her eyes as if half fainting.

"Be patient, poor child!" sobbed the woman, stroking the girl's forehead. "I'll boil some water for you to drink, soon!"

The Jap leader watched quizzically as the husband replaced the quilt, mumbling that his niece was very sick.

"Women's Association!" yelled the Jap, still probing.

"What's that you say?" asked the "deaf" woman. "You want rations? We haven't much food in the house but I'll look and see."

"Let's go!" said a traitor disgustedly. "It's not worth all this trouble. Besides it stinks in here!"

The raiding party left, jabbering angrily in Japanese. Quickly, the husband closed the door behind them.

"I thought we were all finished!" said the woman, sighing with relief.

Mey bounded from the *kang* and threw her arms around her. "I'll never forget this," she said gratefully. "You're my second mother!"

"I'm sorry I didn't understand the situation at first, comrade," apologized the husband. "I beg your pardon."

"Don't feel that way, uncle," said Mey fervently. "I caused you so much worry and danger. . . . I beg *your* pardon! Things are too critical now, but when times get better, I want to come here often and thank you two properly!"

Mey planned only to spend the night, but the next morning they heard that the Japs still hadn't left the village. Nevertheless, she decided she had to risk it. After the husband had scouted out a fairly safe route, she escaped into the countryside while the Japs were gathered for their morning meal.

In the fields, a sea of wheat swayed with heavy heads. Weeds were sprouting around the corn and the tall *kaoliang*, but there was no one to hoe them. Mey met hundreds of other peasants, frightened and hiding in the crops. The women stopped their babies' mouths with the nipples of their breasts, so that they wouldn't cry, while their own tears dropped on the faces of the nursing infants. Enemy cavalry and vehicles coursed back and forth along the roads, while the refugees, motionless and scarcely daring to breathe, watched them fearfully.

Near noon, the sound of rifle fire could be heard close by. Cautiously peering over the tops of the wheat, Mey saw a company of Japs chasing Blacky Tsay and a group of men down the road. Both sides were firing as they ran. A Jap machine gun began stuttering, and Mey's heart almost jumped from her body at the confused panic of her comrades. But when Blacky shouted a command and waved his hand, his men cut over into the fields on the opposite side of the road. He lagged behind, a smoking pistol in each hand, to cover their retreat.

The air was shattered by the sound of a cannon burst, and a small tree directly in the back of Blacky flew to the sky in fragments. Bathed in cold perspiration, Mey watched him leap up, his clothes on fire. He ran zigzag, shedding his smoking, tattered garments as he fled, revealing several bleeding wounds in his neck and shoulders. The other guerrillas were already gone, and over two hundred Japs concentrated on getting Blacky. The last she saw of him he was plunging deep into the high *kaoliang*, while the Japs were shouting crazily in pursuit, and cannon shells were screaming overhead.

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Refugees in great number wandered aimlessly. Once Mey ran into her friend Nyur, and the two girls clung to one another crying happily. They managed to stay together for a while, begging food when they were hungry. Then they lost each other again when they stumbled upon a party of Japs and fled pell-mell.

A little later, nearly exhausted, Mey came upon an old woman gathering herbs. "Mother," she pleaded, "do a good deed. I have no family left. Take me home with you and let me be your daughter!"

The woman took pity on her. She led Mey to a ramshackle building in a small devastated village.

After two days, the woman discovered in conversation that Mey was a cadre. Fearfully, she ordered Mey to leave.

"You see how dark it is outside," said Mey pathetically, "and it's raining hard. Where do you want me to go?"

The old lady shook with terror. "You must go! The day before yesterday, a woman sheltered a Ba Lu and her whole family lost their heads! Her — her daughter-in-law's breasts were cut off . . . her insides spilled all over the ground! . . . if you don't go, I won't be able to stand it!"

Mey begged that she be permitted to stay until morning, but the woman turned a deaf ear.

"It's the Japs. . . . They scare me so. . . . Don't think I'm hard-hearted. . . ." With tears in her eyes, she pushed Mey out of the door.

Drenched and blinded by the rain, the girl fought her way against the buffeting wind down the deserted street. Every door she tried was locked, not a soul was in sight. Wetter and colder by the minute, she took shelter in a temple near the edge of the village. She had just entered when a tremendous flash of lightning illuminated every recess of the room. A giant green-faced idol, his great mouth gaping menacingly, seemed to glare right through her with gleaming eyes. In his thick right hand a large iron scourge was raised to strike. In that instant, her hair stood on end as all the terrifying superstitious stories of her childhood flooded wildly through her mind. She fled in horror.

Shaken and depressed, Mey huddled in a corner of the temple courtyard and wept. The Japs were everywhere. How could they be beaten? Her comrades — Da-shwey, Shwang, Blacky Tsay — were gone, maybe dead. She was the only one left. Pushed out in the middle of the night, if the Japs caught and killed her, who could testify that she gave her life in the war of resistance? How could she keep her promise to be firm and resolute?

She thought of her mother whom she had no chance to see before she died two years ago. She thought of her baby who perished at the careless wicked hands of Jinlung. Anger, bitterness and pain mounted in her, as the rain continued to fall steadily, like the tears of the suffering masses. Racked with grief, she noticed a windlass on the other side of the courtyard. She knew that beneath it must be a well. Crying despondently, Mey crawled toward it, determined to jump into the well and kill herself.

Lightning flickered dangerously close. She started with fear, then paused for a moment to quiet the wild beating of her heart.

Insistent thoughts that refused to be suppressed forced themselves to the surface of her consciousness. She, a Communist, had taken her oath before the picture of Chairman Mao. . . . Her leaders told her to be firm, not to give way to pessimism. What would be the use of the fruitless death of a suicide? She remembered the stories Blacky had told of the Red Army crossing snowy mountains and scorching plains, and how the men had stood firm under crushing difficulties. Mey remembered how, only the other day, though bleeding and outnumbered, Blacky had continued to fight against hundreds of Japs.

What a shameful thing it would be to kill myself, she realized. If I die, my death should have a value! It should be for the sake of our people!

Dazed and weak, she leaned against the side of the well for a long time. She was wakened from her reverie only when the cold wind, biting through her rainsoaked clothes, chilled her into violent trembling. She crawled back to the corner of the courtyard where, completely worn out, she fell into a fitful sleep.

*

At dawn the rain stopped, and Mey woke, her cold, wet clothes hugging her body clammily. Afraid of Jap patrols, she left the village and walked until she came to a ruined country estate. Standing in the doorway of a small cottage in the garden was Nyur and her friends from the cadre school — Tien and the teacher Miss Chen! Like long lost relatives, the women embraced one another with tears of joy.

"You've all changed so!" said Mey, sadly.

"So have you," they replied.

They made her get out of her wet clothes, which they wrung out for her and hung up to dry, and loaned her some things to wear in the meantime. They told her that Miss Chen had sprained her leg climbing over a wall to escape the Japs; that Tien had abdominal cramps and was so doubled over that she couldn't straighten her back. Yet in spite of their troubles, they were in good spirits.

"If I only had my bundle here, I'd be happy," said Nyur, mischievously. "Mey, you remember the day we were separated running from the Japs. Well, I dropped my bundle which had all my things in it in a meadow. After wandering around for two days and two nights, I came back to the same place — don't ask me how — and there was the bundle! Now, we've been on the run again, and I've lost the damn thing again!"

The girls giggled.

"Not so loud," cautioned Miss Chen. "We're too near the main road. We'd better be moving."

They set out, Mey and Nyur supporting the teacher. Tien walked leaning forward, with both hands pressed against the small of her back.

"This back of mine is a caution!" she groaned. "No matter what I do, I can't straighten up! Really now!"

The irrepressible Nyur promptly mimicked her with such sorrowful moans and exaggerated grimaces that they all turned red in the face with suppressed laughter. But then Miss Chen and the two girls on whom she was leaning skidded on the wet field. They slipped into the mud, plastering their bodies with it, and splashing a great blob on to Nyur's nose. No longer able to contain themselves, they roared hilariously.

"Serve you right!" chuckled Tien, pointing to the yellow mud clinging to Nyur's slim body. "That's what you get for making fun of me! You know what the kids say: 'Immitate my talk and your mouth will rot; immitate my walk and you'll turn into a yellow dog!' Well, you're certainly yellow enough now!"

Shaking with laughter, they picked up Miss Chen. Nyur held her under the arms and Mey took her feet. They swayed unsteadily into the wheat fields, out of sight of the enemy.

"I feel like that heroine in the play who rode around on a cloud," said Miss Chen, sighing in mock comfort.

The next few days they wandered about the countryside not daring to go into any of the villages. But there was nothing to eat, nothing even to drink. If they met a peasant, they'd beg a corn muffin, and share it in four parts, each trying to force the biggest pieces on the others. The rest of the time, they ate

sweet fennel, wild onion — anything that had a little nourishment. Dark rings appeared beneath their eyes; their stomachs felt like pieces of twisted rope.

They slept on the damp ground in their thin clothes, with only the sky for a cover. Their hunger never left them. Miss Chen caught a cold, which rapidly became worse until her condition was very serious. Her body burned with fever. Holding her in their arms, the girls tried desperately to think of a way to help her.

"This won't do," said Mey. "Even a healthy person can't take this kind of life very long; a sick person certainly can't stand it. We've got to get her to a village where she can rest and eat some decent food."

Miss Chen was opposed to the idea. "Don't risk it," she commanded weakly. "I probably can't get over this anyway. I can't walk — I can't even stand, I'm just a burden to you. If we go into the village, we may all be finished. You'd better go on without me!"

"Don't talk like that," cried the girls indignantly. "If we die, we'll all die together!"

Ignoring her protests, that night they slowly carried her toward the nearest village. They stopped at its outskirts; Mey and Nyur went ahead to scout. The girls came back to report happily that the enemy had just left. They had found a peasant woman who was willing to let them rest in her house!

Carrying Miss Chen, they quietly entered the village and proceeded to a small thatched house. A woman about forty stuck her head out of the door. She looked carefully around.

"Come in quickly and don't make any noise!" she whispered.

She posted her daughter at the door to keep a look out, and led them to an interior room. She made Miss Chen comfortable on a warm *kang*, covered her with a quilt, then blew out the lamp.

"We're all one family — I'm in the resistance movement too," said the woman softly. "You can stay here as long as you like. If the Japs come again, we'll get you back out in the fields. Make yourselves at home — I'm going to boil some drinking water."

The girls luxuriantly stretched their aching bones on the *kang* besides Miss Chen. Instantly they fell asleep. A little later, the woman shook them out of their deep slumbers. The oil lamp was glowing cheerfully and the window had been covered with an old robe.

"Let's have dinner, comrades," she said in a low voice. "I've been hiding this food for some time — afraid the Japs would get it. Nothing would suit me better than for you to eat it!"

She had placed four piping hot bowls of soup on the *kang*. Now, she handed each of the women a pair of chopsticks. They raised the bowls and were amazed to find them swimming with fine noodles made of white flour — a great luxury for poor peasants — and fragrant with the odor of onions. Aiya! After what they had been eating for so long! They laughed hysterically as tears rolled down their cheeks.

"Godmother," sobbed Nyur. "If you had given us a couple of ordinary corn muffins, it would have been plenty! But to make white flour — white flour noodles. . . ."

The girls and Miss Chen were deeply moved. The good lady's own eyes were moist as she urged them to eat.

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After dinner, with the exception of the sick Miss Chen, they went into the nearby wheat fields and dug a deep wide cave with a narrow opening. The work took them all night to complete, for they had to labor in the dark and scatter the excavated earth far from the entrance. The woman brought dry fuel stalks from home with which they lined the floor.

They decided to spend all their time in the cave, since the Japs were constantly raiding and might come without warning. Twice a day, the woman and her daughter, pretending to go out and pick wild lettuce, brought them food and reported the news. The situation was not encouraging. A puppet administration had been set up in the village. In the neighboring larger villages Japs and puppet troops were building and occupying fortresses.

After living in the dark, damp cave for several days, they became lousy, with boils and pimples all over them, and they were generally miserable. With four of them crowded together, they couldn't stretch their legs; the low roof made them keep their heads shrunk between their shoulders. "Just like a dressed chicken in a butcher shop," said Mey ruefully.

"Hiding in here like this is suffocating me!" groaned Nyur. "I'd give anything to be able to get out and run around a little!"

"You'd better put up with it," said Tien. "Don't look for trouble."

"If we only knew where our people are, we could get in touch with them," said Miss Chen.

"This cave is too small for the four of us. It would be much roomier if there were only two in it. Suppose Nyur and I go out and try to make contact," suggested Mey to Miss Chen. "Tien can stay here and look after you. If we succeed, we'll send men here to get you. What do you say?"

And so it was agreed.

That night, the two girls crawled out of the cave and headed in the direction of Hwang Hwa village. They carried an old basket which the woman had packed with boiled sweet potatoes and corn muffins. After having been cramped up for so long, it felt wonderfully free to walk down a country road in the soft summer night. Nyur breathed deeply; she said she could smell the fragrance of daffodils.

"No," said Mey. "That's the odor of green wheat. We can be active again now that the fields are overgrown with tall green screens."

They reached the fringes of the village and paused in the shadows, listening. It was completely still. After a whispered consultation, they entered the village and wove their way through its narrow lanes. There was no one in sight. The doors of the peasants' home were barred fast; they didn't dare to knock. In a quandary they hesitated. The sound of a foreign record on a phonograph and someone jabbering in an unintelligible tongue could be distinctly heard.

Mey clutched Nyur's arm. "We've come in right under their noses!" she murmured.

Dubiously, Nyur poked her head around the corner of the lane to peer at the main street. A great gleaming fortress tower reared up before her eyes. She drew back hastily.

"What rotten luck!" she hissed. "Let's get out of here!"

Turning to go, they froze as a small door creaked open and a man stepped out. "Stand where you are!" he barked. "What are you doing here?"

"We're beggars," said Nyur quickly.

"What can you beg in the middle of the night?" said the man suspiciously. "There's something funny about you two!" Mey's heart contracted when she saw the pistol in his hand. "Come with me!" he ordered. He forced them ahead of him through the door.

When they got inside the house, the man snatched the basket which Nyur had been carrying and examined its contents in the lamp light. It still contained two sweet potatoes and several corn muffins.

He shook his head. "You're lying! Beggars go from one house to another and pick up something here and something there. How come these corn muffins are all the same size and all the same color? Plainly, they're one batch. You'll tell the truth if you know what's good for you!" he threatened.

The girls realized that they had to change their story in a hurry.

"We're not really beggars," admitted Mey. "We were visiting relatives. We took the wrong turn and lost the road in the dark." Pointing at Nyur, she continued, "This is my cousin. She's young and not very bright. What she told you was wrong, but you shouldn't take it seriously."

The man wore civilian clothes and was only about twenty. He looked at the two girls penetratingly, first one, then the other. He stared at them so long that they hung their heads, and shivers ran up their spines.

Suddenly, he shouted, "You two definitely are cadres! What district do you work in? Speak up!"

"We don't even know any cadres!" said Nyur in fervent denial. "We're just plain peasants!"

The man looked at them for a moment, then snapped another question, "Do you or don't you know Blacky Tsay?"

"No! We don't!" chorused the girls, becoming more and more frightened.

"I'll send you to the fortress if you don't tell the truth!" yelled the man, and laughed as their faces turned pale. "Don't worry," he said reassuringly. "We're in the movement too. This is the headquarters of the county militia. I'm going to bring someone to talk to you."

As soon as they heard the door close behind him, the girls hastily began to confer.

"Who does he think he's kidding?" scoffed Mey. "When would the county militia set up its headquarters practically underneath a Jap fortress! We'll make up a new story and stick to it to the death!"

The girls sat close together on the *kang* and planned in whispers what they were going to say.

In a few minutes, their questioner returned, followed by a dark, bushy-bearded, smiling man. It was Blacky Tsay! The girls leaped down from the *kang* ecstatically.

"After all that trouble, it really *is* you!" they shouted in relief.

"You nearly scared us to death!" said Nyur, pumping Blacky's large hand vigorously.

The wounds in his neck still hadn't healed completely, and his head was cocked to one side as he laughed, "What are you two doing dressed up as beggars? Our cadres thought you were traitors!"

"I thought he was a traitor!" giggled Nyur, pointing at the young man.

"How can you be so rash and stay here right next to the fortress?" asked Mey.

"We figured out that the closer we were to the enemy the less chance they'd notice us," grinned Blacky. "If we can make contact again with our cadres and the masses there's nothing we won't be able to do! There may be few mountains in Hopei province, but we'll make a mountain of people that'll be harder than rock!"

He took them to the home of a peasant, where they washed and had something to eat. It was as if they had come home at last after being away for years. They talked happily without end. Back with their organization, the girls knew things could be done; they basked in the atmosphere of faith and high spirits.

Blacky gave them news of many of their comrades, but of Da-shwey he had heard nothing since his capture. He sent men to bring Miss Chen and Tien, and told the girls to get some rest.

After they had relaxed a few days, Blacky called on Mey and Nyur.

"From now on, we'll all work together again," he said. "We've already set up district administrations; there's plenty to do. I want both of you to report to Shwang in the village of Hsi Yu."

He appointed a cadre to take them to their destination.

Chapter IX

The Inquisition — Summer, 1942

At nightfall of the day Da-shwey was captured, the prisoners were halted a few hundred yards from a large village. Houses were still burning in the outskirts. In the light of the fires, Jap soldiers ran back and forth. Chinese traitors who emerged from the village announced that it was billeted full. Nevertheless, the women prisoners were led toward it.

With sinking heart, Da-shwey watched them filing by. Some of the women walked with their heads down; some were crying; some stared fearfully around; others carried babies in their arms. But nowhere among the prisoners could Da-shwey see Mey. What's happened to her? he worried. Have they destroyed

her already? Then his head rang with a blow from a Jap club as the men captives were beaten into motion again.

The Japs drove the men to a big open field. On all sides flames of burning homes were dancing briskly. Japs were throwing doors, window frames and furnitures into the blaze. The knapsacks with which the captives had been burdened were removed, and the men felt light and relaxed for a moment. The Japs squatted and ate their evening meal. Of course the prisoners had no hope of being given any food, but what they wanted more than anything was some water for their parched aching throats.

An old man arrived carrying a bucket of water. Instantly he was surrounded by the men. With croaking voices they pleaded for a drink. A Jap officer rode up on a white horse, and from its back fiercely kicked the prisoners away from the bucket. The horse drank until its belly was distended like a melon and the water was gone. After the Jap rode away, a few of the men flung themselves on the ground where the bucket had been standing and licked the damp mud, while the other prisoners glared after the officer with hate burning in their eyes.

That night, the bound men slept in a circle, head to head, in the open field. They were ringed by two rows of soldiers, so that any attempt at escape would involve stepping on a sleeping Jap.

Da-shwey couldn't sleep all night. Some of the prisoners groaned and sighed, but were cursed into silence by the sentries.

In the morning, after the Japs and puppet troops had their breakfast, the prisoners were lined up. Six of them, including Da-shwey, were picked out from the others. The remainder were sent to the village to build a fortress. Da-shwey and his group were told that they were going to the Jap-occupied city.

The city-bound prisoners marched all day. At dusk they halted at another village. They were led into a filthy compound lined by one-story buildings. The Japs took the north wing which was the cleanest; the puppets occupied the east wing. The captives, still tied together, were shoved into a small room made of mud bricks in the west wing.

The prisoners hadn't eaten or drunk anything for two days. They were so hungry that their stomachs seemed glued to their backbones and their throats burned like fire. Hot, exhausted and dizzy, the men fell weakly to the ground. But there was no relief, for even a groan brought a Jap bayonet thrust menacingly through the window.

The Japs stationed two puppet soldiers on guard at the door of the prisoners' room, had their dinner and went to sleep.

Besides Da-shwey, the prisoners included a village cadre and a militiaman. The rest were peasants. One of the peasants, a boy about seventeen, was nearly mad with thirst.

"I'm dying for a drink," he sobbed. "I'd drink piss if I could get it, but I'm so dry I can't even piss!" Moaning, he beat his head against the wall so violently that a shower of dirt particles fell to the floor.

Da-shwey had a pitying look on his face, but it slowly changed into a smile of inspiration. He had been trying desperately to think of how to fulfil his duty as a Communist; how to lead the people out of their sufferings. Now that fine rain of dirt from the mud wall gave him an idea.

"Don't worry, little brother," he soothed the boy. "We're going to get out of this."

Da-shwey's head swam as he got to his knees and dragged himself over to the window. He waited until there was a change of guard and the new sentry came to the window to peer in at the prisoners before taking his post at the door. Da-shwey talked and pleaded with the puppet soldier, and finally convinced him to bring some water for the men.

As soon as they heard that water was coming, the prisoners struggled to a sitting position. Da-shwey told them to move closer together while he squatted in their midst.

"We're all friends in trouble," he said, "and we have to talk this over. I'm sure when we get to the city tomorrow, we'll either be shot or have our heads cut off. Anyhow we're going to die. If you're willing to risk everything right now to escape, the water may save our lives!"

He told them his plan. After they whispered together for a few minutes, they all agreed.

When the puppet soldier brought them a small pail of water, the prisoners thanked him profusely. He embarrassedly mumbled that after all they were all Chinese, went out and locked the door behind him. Da-shwey told the men to take a few sips each. As a Communist he set an example by drinking nothing.

Feverishly straining, the prisoners finally untied the rope which bound their hands behind their backs. Then the men soaked their sleeves and their head kerchiefs in the precious water, and rubbed the damp cloths against a section of the mud wall until it became soft. With one man keeping a lookout at the window, the other five scraped steadily at the moistened wall with their fingers.

They had just scraped a small hole through, when the man at the window tensely hissed, "He's coming! He's coming!"

The prisoners hastily grouped in their original position, with their hands behind them holding the rope. Da-shwey sat with his broad back against the hole. No one dared to breathe.

The puppet soldier entered the door. "Did you have enough to drink?" he inquired.

"Plenty! Plenty!" the prisoners fervently assured him. "It was wonderful!"

Smiling, he removed the bucket and again locked the door.

Some of the men were trembling with fear and excitement.

"Don't be scared," Da-shwey urged them. "Just a little more work and we'll be out!"

The digging continued. Forgetting their hunger, forgetting their thirst, calling on resources of strength they didn't know they had, the prisoners enlarged the hole sufficiently to permit the passage of a man's body. Da-shwey poked his head through, looked carefully around, then crawled out. One by one, the others followed. Da-shwey stealthily led them out of the village to the open fields, where they all separated.

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After wandering in the country for a few days, Da-shwey realized he couldn't accomplish anything alone. He decided to spend some time in one of the under-

ground "forts". The "forts" were places of concealment in the homes or fields of peasants who were also members of the underground. At the height of the Jap "mopping-up" campaign, the "forts" provided places of refuge and rest, and a means of keeping contact with other members of the organization.

That night, Da-shwey entered a village and climbed the compound wall of "Uncle" Yin. Yin, a red-faced old man with a clean white beard, was eating dinner with his grandson when Da-shwey came in.

"Da-shwey!" he said in pleased surprise. "You're the first one of our people I've seen in a long time! It's been like a sky without any sun! I've been feeling terrible!" He insisted that Da-shwey join them on the *kang* for dinner.

During the meal, Uncle revealed that he had dug what he called a "chicken's nest", actually a deep hole, beneath the hearth. He said he had been hoping someone would come along and use it. After they chatted a while, Uncle lit a chemically treated rope to fumigate the mosquitoes. He told Da-shwey to sleep peacefully on the *kang;* he and his grandson would keep a lookout for the Japs.

"With me around, there's nothing to worry about," said Uncle. "I may be an old codger, but I've got sharp ears!"

Carrying a tattered blanket, he went up on the roof with his grandson. Uncle stayed awake all night, listening for sounds which would herald the enemy's approach.

At dawn, he heard them. The Japs were entering the village. The old man aroused Da-shwey, and removed the big cauldron from the hearth. Beneath the ashes was a large sheet of metal which served as a cover for the entrance to an underground hole. After Da-shwey had wriggled his way out of sight, Uncle re-covered the metal sheet with the ashes, replaced the cauldron and lit the fire.

It didn't take long before a search party reached Uncle's house. A traitor aimed a kick at the old man squatting calmly before the hearth.

"Hey, you! Are there any Ba Lu hiding here?"

Uncle slowly rose to his feet and cupped his hand behind an ear. "What did you say?"

"I asked have you seen any Ba Lu?" shouted the traitor.

"Oh, Ba Lu. Yep, I've seen 'em. Wear grey uniforms, they do. Carry rifles!"

"That's right, that's right," said the traitor impatiently. "Where did you see them? Speak up, quick!"

"Aiya, there were lots of 'em! They spent the whole night in the village!"

"When did they come? Where are they?" asked the traitor excitedly.

"Don't get upset. Let me think a minute. I was coming back from the market that day. Been buying some New Year's pictures. The day the Kitchen God goes back to heaven to report . . . "

The traitor angrily slapped Uncle across the face. "Mother's —! Who asked you about last year, you old coffin carrion!"

"Hole, hole!" barked one of the Japs.

"He wants to know where the hole is!" the traitor roared in Uncle's ear.

The old man squinted his eyes in great perplexity. "Haven't had any holes here since I got that cat. She's death to rats! No rat holes in months!"

"You mother's — !" screamed the traitor. "Not small holes! Big ones — dug in the ground!"

Uncle's head was cocked to one side, as he listened intently to every word. A beatific smile spread over his face. "So that's what you mean! Should have said so in the first place! Come with me!"

He led them to a pit in the rear yard, where rotted manure was liquefying. "There you are!" he pointed triumphantly. "Only started three months ago. Not very strong yet. See — " He lifted a wooden ladle full of the vile mess and stuck it under their noses.

Coughing and gagging, the searchers recoiled in disgust. "Put it back, put it back!" said the traitor hastily. The party left immediately, cursing the old man with considerable heartiness.

As soon as they were gone, Uncle let Da-shwey out and the two whooped and laughed themselves nearly sick. These were hard times and even a small victory did great things for the spirit.

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After a few quiet days, Da-shwey became restless. He was anxious to learn the whereabouts of his friends and return to work. One night he left the haven of Uncle's protection, and went back into the fields to look for the gun which he had buried.

In the bright moonlight, Da-shwey observed regretfully how weeds were flourishing among the *kaoliang* and the tall corn. That ought to be hoed, he said to himself.

Entering a grove of trees, he suddenly found himself face to face with Hoshang and Jow the fisherman! The men were overjoyed at seeing each other again, but Hoshang's face was solemn.

"Da-shwey," he said, taking him by the arm, "I have something to tell you. Try not to take it too hard. The Japs took your father and tortured him, but he wouldn't talk. After they let him go he only lived two days."

Dazed and stricken, his face devoid of expression, Da-shwey slowly sat down on a grave mound. Only when the men tried to comfort him did tears begin to course down his cheeks. Then his crying kept increasing in intensity until sobs racked his whole body. At last he stopped and angrily rubbed his eyes.

"You filthy Japs and traitors," he grated through clenched teeth, "to kill a sick old man with your poison hands! I'll revenge him if it's the last thing I do!"

Jow said he had heard that Da-shwey's brother Ru was working with Shwang. The latter had dug up all the buried guns. Twur had been saved after being buried alive and Mey had escaped from the Japs. This good news made Da-shwey feel a little better.

He asked the whereabouts of Shwang and Blacky. Hoshang told him, adding that he had just come from Blacky whose instructions were that all the old cadres should join Shwang and revive the organization. Blacky had stressed that the members must keep contact with one another at all costs. They must never part from their weapons and should use them against the enemy when necessary. They must intensify their work with the masses. When the Japs relaxed their present drive, the cadres should again mobilize the strength of the people and begin picking off isolated enemy posts.

"Blacky already has told Shwang to organize these jobs in his locality," said Hoshang. "Shwang has started work in an underground peasant's "fort" in Hsi Yu. We can all go together."

When they reached the village, it turned out that Hoshang had forgotten the address. Becoming more and more worried, the men wandered through the narrow lanes until the morning star appeared on the horizon; but Hoshang was unable to find the right house in the dark. They decided to give up the search for the time being and returned to the open fields. Each man taking a turn at sentry duty, they went to sleep in a hay stack.

In the misty dawn, Da-shwey was awakened by the sound of men moving through the tall *kaoliang*. Sentry Hoshang was fast asleep! Da-shwey roused him and Jow.

"Get up!" he whispered. "Someone's coming!"

He and Hoshang hid behind the haystack, but Jow, who had a gun, stood waiting in the open. Five traitors walked out of the *kaoliang*. They were leading a raiding party of Japs against the village. Jow fired two shots and killed one of them. He then ran quickly out of sight, drawing the traitors after him in pursuit.

Da-shwey and Hoshang, fleeing in the opposite direction, plunged right into the arms of a squad of Japs. Hoshang yanked himself free from his captor's grasp and lost him in the *kaoliang*, but Da-shwey was overpowered by several Japs.

*

The Japs dragged their prisoner to the village and tied him to a big willow tree. Iino, their short fat platoon leader, could speak a little Chinese.

"You what kind work do?" he demanded.

"I raise melons."

The platoon leader sniffed unbelievingly through his purple whiskey-colored nose. He pinched Da-shwey's biceps and leg muscles, and felt his powerful shoulders.

"Ba Lu gentleman!" sneered the Jap. A couple of soldiers began punching Da-shwey in the face and kicking him with their heavy boots. They paused when a squad of Japs appeared with another prisoner whose head was running with blood. It was Hoshang! They had caught him after all.

They pushed him in front of Da-shwey. "Do you know this man?" a traitor holding a heavy belt in his hand asked Hoshang.

"I don't know him, how can he know me," interrupted Da-shwey.

The traitor smashed Da-shwey across the face with the belt. "Who the mother's — is asking you!" He prodded Hoshang. "Speak up! Do you know him or don't you?"

"I — I don't know him," said Hoshang.

Two Japs flung him to the ground and beat him unmercifully with clubs. Hoshang cried and screamed himself hoarse; still the rain of blows continued. In his agonized struggle he managed to get to his feet, and started to stagger toward the fields.

"Two Ba Lu both die dead!" raged the platoon leader. He shot Hoshang through the head.

Da-shwey closed his eyes and waited for the end, but the second shot didn't come. He looked at Hoshang's inert pitiful body and rage mounted in him.

"Why don't you kill me?" he shouted.

"Are you a Ba Lu?" insisted a traitor.

"Yes, I'm Ba Lu! Now go ahead and shoot!"

The platoon leader grinned with satisfaction and jabbered something in Japanese to the traitor.

Another prisoner was dragged forward — a well dressed merchant. He denied emphatically that he was a Ba Lu. The Japs began to beat him.

"Wait! Wait!" he yelled. "I want to tell you — I have a brother who's a very good friend of yours! You have to be good to me for his sake!"

"Who's your brother?" asked a traitor.

The merchant undid his leg gaiter, produced a roll of occupation currency and handed it over. "This is my brother!" he said with an oily smile. "Isn't he a good friend of yours?"

"You're a real business man," commended the traitor.

The Jap platoon leader wrinkled his bulbous nose and squinted his eyes, as he bared his yellow teeth appreciatively. "Money, money!" he nodded. "Merchant, good!" He waved his hand. "Go, go!"

The merchant went as fast as his legs would carry him.

All of the villagers were lined up in a long row. The Japs untied Da-shwey and ordered him to pick out the Ba Lu. Trembling women and men, young and old, watched him fearfully.

As Da-shwey was shoved along the line, he was shocked to see Shwang among the peasants. Shwang looked at him as if to say, "You're a Communist. Let's see how much guts you've got!"

Holding a bayonet, the Japs platoon leader asked, "Here have Ba Lu?"

"No!"

Iino narrowed his piggy eyes and pressed the point of the bayonet against Da-shwey's chest.

"There are none," said Da-shwey through gritted teeth. "Stab!"

The Jap grunted and pushed him forward. The people were pale with fright; many women were crying. Da-shwey recognized his brother Ru, Jumpy Ma, and several other militiamen. They stared at him apprehensively, but he completed the forced inspection without identifying anybody.

Iino was furious. At his command, soldiers led out three large fierce dogs, straining at their leashes, their red tongues lolling between their teeth. Iino shouted an order and patted Da-shwey's legs. The dogs leaped at the captive's thighs, ripped chunks of flesh with their cruel jaws. Da-shwey howled like an animal as his blood ran in rivulets to make pools at his feet. The dogs were pulled off.

Da-shwey swayed weakly. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. The Jap patted his arms and barked another command. Again the gleaming teeth of the wolfish animals tore human flesh. Da-shwey screamed and fainted.

A white-haired old peasant woman rushed forward from the horrified onlookers. She threw herself on his prostrate body. "How can you torture him so! My son! You're killing him!"

All the peasants were wailing and sobbing openly now. "He's a good farm boy!" they cried. "Have mercy on him!"

The Japs became rather worried because they weren't sure what turn this mass reaction would take. They kicked the old woman aside and carried Da-shwey away.

*

When Da-shwey recovered consciousness, he found himself in a large wooden cage in the rear courtyard of the village military police post. After sunset, the old man who served as jailor approached him.

"Your mother has come to see you. Keep your voices down," whispered the old man. He beckoned to a woman standing in the shadows.

My mother has been dead for years. Who can this be? wondered Da-shwey. He looked carefully at his visitor. She was in her sixties, her hair completely white, and she was carrying a basket. He recognized her as the mother of Shugen, the boy who had been buried alive by the Japs in their last "mopping-up" campaign.

She said a few words to the jailor. He walked away.

Grasping the bars of the cage, the old lady knelt and brought her head close to the prostrate captive. "Da-shwey," she said softly, "I know you. From now on, say that you're Shugen. Shwang wants you to keep a grip on yourself; don't admit anything. Everybody in the village is with you! Ah, my dear, we all suffered with you this morning! Nobody could eat all day! We're raising a little money for you."

A warmth diffused Da-shwey's body and tears came to his eyes. "Mother, set your heart at ease," he said, very moved. "Tell Shwang, live or die, I'll do a good job of it. Don't any of you worry about me!"

The old lady wiped her eyes with the hem of her tattered jacket, then took from her basket a considerable quantity of food which she handed in through the bars. She also produced a small roll of bills and forced them into Da-shwey's hand.

"This is from me personally," she said. "It isn't much, but it may help." She didn't dare to stay too long. After a few more words, the old lady left.

Two days later, Da-shwey was brought before the Japanese commander for further questioning. Among the peasants standing outside the open door, he could see the old lady who had visited him in jail.

The Jap commander, a pale man wearing little spectacles, was seated behind a long table. Beside him sat an interpreter and the leader of the local puppet troops. The interpreter asked Da-shwey his name, where he lived, his occupation. Da-shwey insisted he was Shugen, a peasant native of the village.

The puppet leader pounded the table. "Are you or are you not a Ba Lu?" he shouted.

"Plowing, planting, hoeing and reaping all year round, when would I have time to be a Ba Lu?" Da-shwey countered.

"If you aren't Ba Lu, why did you say the other day that you were?"

"They kept beating me 'til I didn't know what I was saying!"

The puppet leader whispered something to the Jap, who nodded and wrote the words "Communist Party" on a slip of paper. The Jap pointed at Da-shwey.

"You, Communist Party!" Da-shwey turned pale, but the Jap wrote an "x" in front of the words and said, "You — not!"

He used the same routine with "Ba Lu" and "underground worker", each time making Da-shwey think he was hearing his death sentence. Finally the Jap wrote the word "citizen".

"You — citizen, good, good! Can go!" said the commander.

"His excellency forgives you," said the puppet leader with a gracious smile. "Go back and tend your fields like a good man." He ordered that Da-shwey be untied.

As the questioners left the hearing room, the Jap could be heard saying to the puppet, "I think this case you make many money! Get rich!"

"If I made money," protested the puppet virtuously, "you can do this!" He drew his hand across his throat.

The Jap only giggled.

When Da-shwey stepped into the street, he was surrounded by dozens of peasants. They bound his wounds, gave him clean clothes, and escorted him out of the village. They said Hsye Liu wasn't safe for him, that they would lead him to another village where the Japs weren't so active.

After they had gone only a few miles, they had to get off the road to let a group of horsemen go cantering by. Da-shwey thought the fat fellow in the lead looked very much like Ho, the bandit.

"Fatso is a big shot with the Japs in the city," said the peasants nervously. "Let's keep moving!"

Just then, one of the horsemen, a pistol strapped to his side, turned his mount and came galloping back. "Stand where you are!" he ordered. "What are you doing?"

It was Jinlung, the rascal, the landlord's dog-leg! When the Japs had started their scourge through the countryside, he joined his old master Ho as a traitor. Now he leaned from his horse and peered closely at Da-shwey.

"Ah! I thought it was you!" he said very pleased. He drew his pistol and dismounted. "How lucky, running into you like this! Come along with me!"

"What are you saying?" cried Da-shwey's old "mother". "The Japs just let him go! We're all Chinese. . . . "

With one blow in the face, Jinlung struck her to the ground. He prodded Da-shwey with his pistol. "You're a big hero, aren't you, Mr. Captain?" he sneered. "We'll go show some of your bravery to Commander Ho!"

Two other horsemen had ridden back. They were holding off the peasants who raged impotently.

"I knew you'd turn out this way!" exploded Da-shwey. "Hero or not, at least I'm no stinking traitor! Let's go! Call me bastard if I'm not a better man than you any day!"

Jinlung turned his horse over to the other two puppets. He securely tied Da-shwey's hands behind his back, and pushed him ahead down the road.

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After Ho had fled to join the Japs in 1940, the peasants in Hojwang returned the land which he had seized to its original owners. The grain which they had raised with sweat and blood, and which he had buried in his courtyard, was dug up and distributed to the famine victims.

Then, in 1942, he came back as a leader in the Jap drive against the resistance movement. He repossessed the land, went from house to house confiscating food, robbing, leading off animals, and looking for cadres. Fortunately, with the help of friends and relatives, the cadres and their immediate families all managed to escape. Frustrated, Ho could only give vent to his anger by burning their homes to the ground. It was this man's luxurious residence in Hojwang to which Da-shwey was driven and locked up in a rear room.

That evening, the Jap General, Kamesaka, who was passing through the village, stopped to pay a call on his old friend. Ho served him a magnificent feast with the best wines, and fawned and flattered him sickeningly.

The Jap had a long thin face with high cheek bones and a flowing handle-bar mustache which he constantly stroked. He liked to show off his ability with Chinese, which he spoke very well. Raising his chin, he fixed his yellow eyes on Ho and addressed him proudly in a high feminine voice.

"Japan is the strongest country in the world," he said in clipped precise tones. "The Japanese Imperial Army has completely defeated America in the Pacific. Weak little China should not try to fight with us!"

Kamesaka spoke expansively about "Sino-Japanese Cooperation", and what a fine man Wang Ching-wei was. He said Chiang Kai-shek wasn't bad, either; that behind his back he was offering the "Imperial Army" his hand. The real danger and the enemy to the death was the Communist Party; all should join forces to eradicate it. This part of his dissertation so stirred the Jap's Bushido spirit that the veins stood out on his forehead.

"Destroying Communists is like leveling a forest!" he cried, his soprano voice rising in pitch. "If you only cut off the branches, the trees will still live. You must dig out the underground people's organizations which are the roots. Only then will the Communists die!"

After the Jap general departed, Ho had Da-shwey brought before him. The room in which the "interview" was to take place was glaringly illuminated by two large lamps. Ho's scowling murderous henchmen stood by menacingly. On one side of the room was an array of clubs, knives, ropes, and a special heavy log used for breaking bones by pressure. Branding irons and metal pincers had already turned cherry red in the fire of a small stove. Da-shwey felt as if he had entered the caverns of Hell.

"We've got everything prepared for you," grinned Ho viciously. "Just tell us what kind of food you like best and we'll let you eat it!"

One of the bully boys prodded Da-shwey. "Kneel!" he commanded.

"What for?" demanded Da-shwey. "I'm no criminal!"

"Kneel, you son of a bitch!" barked Ho.

Da-shwey's lip curled contemptuously. "To a lousy traitor?"

"Give him a taste!" howled Ho, livid with fury.

Two men seized Da-shwey's arms, a third twisted a cloth tightly around his forehead, another slapped his cheeks hard with a flat sandle-wood stick. They

hit him over a dozen times. His mouth filled with blood, his tongue became numb and swollen. When they stopped, one of his eyes was closed and bleeding.

Ho resumed his questions. "Where is Shwang and Blacky Tsay?"

"I don't know!"

"That night you and Shwang came here to arrest me — who tipped you off?"

Da-shwey stared at him with his undamaged eye. "Don't ask me. It won't do you any good."

Ho laughed coldly. "He still hasn't had enough to eat! Give him a bowl of millet soup!"

They pulled Da-shwey over backwards and poured nearly a bucketful of dirty yellow liquid into his nostrils. He could hear Ho saying, "You're sure to enjoy this meal!" The stuff seemed to eat into his brain until he fainted. He was revived by the acrid smoke of charred coarse paper waved under his nose.

Ho looked at him with grim satisfaction. "So you're pretty strong, eh! Well let me tell you — if you had an iron mouth and copper teeth and a tongue as hard as cedar wood, you won't be so tough when I get through with you!"

"Talk and be done with it," advised Jinlung in a friendly manner, a cigarette dangling from his lips. "You're a Party member. Of course you know what's going on! You're a big official in the district government; Blacky Tsay is your cousin; you're Shwang's right hand man; you set up most of the people's organizations. Talk and we'll treat you right. Otherwise you'll never come out of this alive! I used to do the same work as you; I used to be the same kind as you. Now I've come over to this side and I'm doing fine!"

Da-shwey's whole body trembled with anger. He spat a mouthful of bloody saliva full in Jinlung's face. "Traitor bastard! When were we ever the same kind!"

Jinlung mopped himself with a silk handkerchief. His wicked eyes contorted into gleaming slits of hate. "You whoreson! Do you still think you're tough?"

Grabbing a red hot poker, he pressed it flat against Da-shwey's bare back. The sizzling noise and horrid smell of burning flesh mingled with Da-shwey's anguished screams. He cried tears of pure blood! Temporarily sated, Jinlung flung the gory iron aside.

Ho watched the torture through veiled eyes, while slowly puffing a cigarette. Suddenly he snapped the butt away and smiled. "Da-shwey, don't be so stubborn," he urged with a false laugh. "You can't smash a rock with a chicken egg! Why suffer? You don't have to take all this for Blacky Tsay and Shwang! If you hold out, you're going to die and no one will grieve for you!"

He ordered that Da-shwey's bonds be removed and let him sit on a stool. "Don't hold this against me!" he pleaded. "I'm a little drunk. The boys were pretty rough with you and I apologize. But we didn't mean anything by it — don't take it to heart! Look at Jinlung — he's very happy with us. He eats the best, dresses well and has plenty of money! If you act sensibly, I'll make you an official and you can be rich!"

As he talked, Ho kept his gaze riveted on his victim. Since Da-shwey hung his head and said nothing, Ho assumed he had convinced him. He winked at Jinlung who went out.

"So far as the resistance movement is concerned," continued Ho smoothly, "I was in it before and I'm still against the Japs! I'm not so active that way now, but the war will last a long time. What's the hurry?"

Jinlung returned, followed by a man carrying a tray of food and wine which was placed on a small table in front of Da-shwey. Ho waved his hand magnanimously.

"Eat, Comrade Da-shwey, and compose yourself! You're a fine fellow — from now on we'll be friends!"

Seething, Da-shwey took up a bowl of thick soup and flung it spattering against Ho's satin gown. The traitors, horrified, quickly seized the kicking struggling prisoner. Ho's face was purple with rage.

"This guy doesn't know when he's well off!" he screamed. "I give him a way out and he won't take it! We'll see if he can stand up against me!"

They pounced on Da-shwey like cruel beasts of prey. For hours they subjected him to every horrid device their sadistic minds could conceive. By dawn he still had revealed nothing and his torturers were exhausted.

Ho wiped the sweat on his glistening bald pate. "He isn't human!" rasped the traitor. "Take him out and cut his head off! Feed his body to the dogs!"

A couple of puppets carried Da-shwey's bleeding insensible form toward the outskirts of the village. Holding a big two-edged sword, the swaggering Jinlung led the way. Behind the death party trotted several of Ho's dogs, eagerly wagging their tails in anticipation.

The moon still shone palely in a grey sky. All the village slept the deep sleep of the hour just before daybreak. Da-shwey came back to consciousness to find himself beneath a large date tree surrounded by the dim forms of the big dogs whose eyes gleamed at him avidly. Jinlung was sharpening the sword on a flat stone that to Da-shwey's dazed mind resembled a sacrificial altar. How the blade flashed in the moonlight!

Da-shwey was forced into a kneeling position. Jinlung began to raise the heavy sword. Then Da-shwey's brain whirled him into darkness again.

Chapter X

Beds of Ice — Autumn and Winter, 1942

"Wait! Wait!" A puppet soldier came running from the village. He seized Jinlung's arm. "The commander says: don't kill him, but report back at once!"

Da-shwey hazily wondered whether he was dead. What was his head still doing on his shoulders? He was vaguely aware of being carried back to Ho's residence and being locked in a small room in the rear courtyard.

Puzzled, sword still in hand, Jinlung went to see Ho. He found him surrounded by his old father and mother and various other relatives, all crying copiously. Ho was angrily tongue-lashing a bodyguard.

Jinlung didn't dare to ask any questions, but sat on the side and listened. He gathered that as the bodyguard was escorting Ho's son Goupi home from the walled town, the two were captured by Shwang's guerrillas. The bodyguard was released with a note demanding the exchange of Da-shwey for Goupi. A meeting place was designated and Ho was given until the following day to complete the transfer. Shwang warned that unless Da-shwey was returned, they would tear Goupi to pieces.

In the little room, Da-shwey opened his eyes. Clotted blood from his wounds adhered his clothes to his body in a dozen places. Lying on the hard ground was painful, but when he tried to sit up it became sheer agony. He felt as if he were being slashed with a hundred knives; he seemed to suffer more intensely than when he was being tortured. Lying with his head propped against the wall, he cried weakly in broken despair.

How did I ever get into this fix! he thought miserably. If I hadn't joined the movement and offended important people, I wouldn't be here now. This is the deepest Hell! No one cares about me! No one knows what I'm going through!

His whole body was racked with unbearable pain. How can I stand it? He was desperate for relief. If I could only die and put an end to this! He cast wildly about in his mind for a means to kill himself, but all he could think of was to dash his brains out against the floor, and he was too weak to do even that.

Da-shwey forced open one eye and stared toward the bright sunlight. It was shining on a window sill where chipper sparrows were twittering. For some reason the sunlight reminded him of Blacky and Mey and his other comrades. He didn't know what happened to them but he was sure that if they lived, they were holding firm. He remembered the day he had raised his arm and sworn that no matter what the circumstances he would not waver and would never give up.

What have I been thinking? he railed against himself. I'm some Communist! I'm not worthy of the masses! The people stand strong against the Jap terror, but I take a little torture and want to die! I sure am a mother's — muddle-head! As he warmed with anger, his wounds seemed less painful.

He thought of the old lady who saved him from the Jap dogs, of "Uncle" Yin who hid him in his "fort", of all the old folks who risked their lives for his sake. To die now would be betraying their trust. The more he compared his lot with that of the people, the more ashamed he became of his temporary weakness.

If I hadn't joined the movement, I might be dead a long time ago! he realized. What about the poor peasants who were killed — buried alive! All because of those bastard Japs and traitors! Mother's — ! I must live — and revenge!

That day, Da-shwey alternately woke and slept. When night fell he was conscious of a rocking motion and could hear the creaking of oars. I'm on a boat, he thought. They must want to throw me in the river and drown me!

He tried to sit up, but he didn't have the strength to even lift his head. The effort made him pass out again.

The puppets stopped and waited at a canal leading from a thicket of reeds. Before long, a small boat emerged and rowed toward them. In its prow sat an old man with a snowy beard that shone like silver in the moonlight. He hailed them and came on board. Ho's father politely bowed him to a seat.

"I have been asked by the others to act as intermediary," said the old man. "Is Da-shwey here?"

Ho's father pointed to a dark form on the deck. The old man lifted the torn blanket and recoiled in dismay. He felt Da-shwey's heart, then slowly replaced the covering. He stood blinking his eyes, unable to speak.

That old rascal, Ho's father, hastily explained that it was the Japs who had reduced Da-shwey to this pitiful condition. He added that as soon as Goupi was returned, Da-shwey would be released.

"I'm afraid we can't do it that way," sighed the grey beard. "I've seen your boy. They haven't harmed a hair of him! With their man in this condition, what can I say? I can't cover the sky with one hand and the earth with the other. I can't do the impossible. Their idea is that you send Da-shwey back first. If that doesn't suit you, I don't know how else to manage it."

Finally, after the old man personally guaranteed that Goupi would be returned, Da-shwey was released. The small boat, with squeaking oar-locks, bore the senseless Da-shwey through many twists and turns in the network of canals. After a long time, it entered another maze of reeds. The old man whistled shrilly. Two little craft gliding out of their hiding place, quickly pulled alongside. Twur, Shwang, and Da-shwey's brother Ru boarded the old man's boat and uncovered the motionless bundle. They froze with horror.

"What do they call this!" cried Twur, grinding his teeth. "They send back our man half dead and expect us to treat Goupi like a guest!"

"We'll settle that account with them later," said Shwang. "Anyhow, we've got Da-shwey back. Don't make things difficult for the old man."

They were caught unawares when Ru jumped back into his boat, whipped out a knife and sliced off Goupi's nose! Goupi screamed, pleading for his life!

"One more mother's — peep out of you," grated Ru, "and I'll slaughter you!"

Shwang leaped across and grabbed the furious boy. "That's enough now!" he ordered. "This won't solve anything."

Cursing, Ru wiped the bloody knife on the sole of his shoe, and slammed the blade back in its scabbard. After Da-shwey was carefully lifted into one of the guerrilla craft, the old man returned Goupi to the bosom of his family.

It was past midnight when the cadres' boats reached a small island in the lake. Mey and several women had been staring into the dark with anxious eyes for hours when the guerrillas returned. The women had already cleaned the room of a peasant's house, heated the *kang*, and boiled water in preparation. It shocked them to see Da-shwey being carried in and gently laid down. They lit the lamp and removed the tattered blanket, then burst into tears at the sight of his tortured body.

Da-shwey! Da-shwey! What have they done to the strong healthy man you used to be! Forehead swollen and misshapen, maggots crawling in open wounds, fingernails torn out, arms black and blue from elbow to hands — not

a whole piece of flesh anywhere on his frame! In a coma, Da-shwey clung to life by a breath.

A medical orderly from the county militia gave him an injection and he slowly roused to consciousness. He opened his left eye and looked at Shwang, then at Mey, then at Twur. Recognition flooded back to him and he struggled to sit up.

"What?" he said incredulously in a faint voice. "It's you?"

Tears running down her cheeks, Mey tenderly supported him. "Da-shwey," she sobbed, "you've come back . . . everything will be all right now!"

His swollen face broke into a grimace that was intended for a smile. "I've come back," he babbled. "We're all together again, ha, ha, ha, ha! . . . " Da-shwey laughed hysterically and raved and gibbered until he fell into an exhausted sleep.

Miserably, his friends watched, with aching hearts.

That autumn, the enemy was firmly entrenched in the North China plain. Every mile there was a fort; every half-mile was a pill-box. In the Bayang Lake section, the Japs built forts in the larger villages and constantly raided the smaller ones. They imposed a heavy land tax, confiscated grain, gorged themselves on pork, white flour, chicken eggs . . . while the peasants ate grass, seeds, elm bark and wild herbs. Soon, most of the wild herbs were gone and many poor people starved to death.

In these most difficult times, Blacky Tsay and Shwang reformed the ranks of the cadres. They strengthened the ties with the masses and organized warfare against the enemy.

The cadres were compelled to move about a great deal, and Da-shwey, who was recuperating slowly, had to rely entirely on the care of the peasants. They would hide him in covered pits, or on a boat, or carry him on a stretcher to a place of concealment in the high reeds. Within a few months, his wounds were completely healed, but he was still very weak.

Winter arrived and froze the waters of the lakes and streams into glistening ice which reflected the lovely blue of the sky. The Japs could now move rapidly from village to village in sleds, and they harried the peasants with incessant raids and searches. The enemy knew very well that the Ba Lu was active again, but could never manage to get hold of them.

Determined to destroy the resistance movement, the Japs dispatched a special "punitive army" to supplement their garrison troops. Then, even the smallest villages were swarming with enemy soldiers — searching, rioting, questioning the peasants. Shwang's group and a number of village officials who were considered too "red", escaped with the aid of the people and made their way into the reed thickets. Though they needed money badly, the peasants refrained from cutting all the reeds that year but only cleared the center of the patches to make places of refuge for the cadres.

Every day, the peasants secretly sent food to the fugitives from their own meagre supply. When they were thirsty, the cadres sucked pieces of ice. The best of their food was given to Da-shwey.

Lying with his bound head resting on Twur's broad chest, he would protest, "I'm all cured. Why should I eat better than anyone else?" Da-shwey would break his muffin or wheat cake and insist that the others share with him equally.

Mey wore cotton-padded trousers which the peasants had given her. Pieces of cloth torn at the knees flapped vigorously in the icy northwest wind.

The pretty Nyur found this highly amusing. "Ha!" she said gaily. "You have curtains on your pants!"

"Don't you go making a show of me!" Mey threatened with a giggle.

During the day, the glare of the ice hurt the cadres' eyes. They would sit huddled together, holding discussions while polishing their rifles.

At night, in the white of the bright moonlight, the guerrillas would set out to harass the enemy in the villages. The cadres remaining behind would use cut reeds for a bed and sleep three and four together under one quilt. Their body heat warmed one another, but it also melted the ice, creating puddles.

"One of these days we're going to melt ourselves right to the bottom of the lake!" said Mey jestingly.

"Huh!" retorted Da-shwey. "This ice is so thick, even a hot stove couldn't burn it through!"

Living on the frozen lake made everyone's eyes swell. The cadres ached and pained all over, but their spirits were high and cheerful.

One night, intense cold gripped the lake, and the wind lashed the cadres with brittle snow. They were so frozen nobody could sleep. Someone started to sing *The Youth of China;* gradually others joined their voices until all were shouting a paean of defiance into the teeth of the gale:

Forward!
Youth of China!
Fight!
Youth of China!
China is like
A ship in a storm.
We must face today's danger
And with all our strength
Wrest
Tomorrow's victory!

Chapter XI

Vulnerable Fortresses — Winter, 1942

For seven days and seven nights, the cadres lived on the ice, while the Jap "punitive army" searched the villages for Ba Lu and questioned the peasants. Unsuccessful, the enemy returned to their strongholds in the cities and the big walled towns. The cadres moved back to the small unoccupied villages.

One night Shwang, Blacky Tsay, and Dean Cheng of the cadre school attended a meeting of county leaders. Reports were made showing that the

Japs had insufficient forces to hold the numerous places they had occupied in their recent drive. They were already withdrawing from many villages and leaving their fortresses garrisoned by puppet troops. The Party leaders determined to begin retaking these villages one by one.

After the meeting, Shwang returned to his own district. With the cadres he made plans for carrying out the Party's directive.

The fortress of the first village they decided to attack was commanded by a vicious brute known as "Cockeye". There was no limit to his demands on the peasants and he beat them cruelly if dissatisfied. On one occasion they brought him some precious white flour which he had ordered them to donate. Raging, he spilled it on the ground and howled that they hadn't delivered enough.

"If I don't — your mother, you don't call me *Dyeh*!" snarled Cockeye.

His wickedness was enormous and the people hated him intensely. Nothing was too depraved for Cockeye. He even raped a fourteen year old girl! When he captured a cadre he wasn't content with killing him, but had to hack his body into eight pieces.

"Who says I don't treat the Ba Lu good?" demanded Cockeye. "I'm going to let this one sleep in the Ice Palace!" He had the dismembered corpse thrown into a hole in the frozen lake.

One day, Cockeye and one of his puppet soldiers went to another village along the lake to extort money. Their business concluded, they demanded two sleds * and drivers to bring them back.

The request was fulfilled; two sleds were soon flying across the frozen surface of Bayang Lake. Skirting the shore, they entered a growth of reeds and canals which Cockeye didn't recognize.

"Hey!" he said, turning his head back to the driver. "This is the wrong way! What are we doing here?"

The skinny peasant wielding the pole smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry, Captain. I cross this lake three hundred and sixty times a year. I know every bit of it with my eyes closed!"

"This is a short cut," added the other driver, a big hulking fellow. "We'll get you home faster this way."

A few minutes later, Cockeye was about to ask again, when he felt something icy cold pressed against the back of his head and heard the driver say, "Don't move!" A hand reached forward and removed his pistol from its holster. The same thing happened on the other sled.

The puppets were ordered to get out and walk deeper into the reeds. The big peasant, Twur, shoved Cockeye ahead of him about twenty yards away from the other prisoner.

"Dog of a traitor!" said Twur in a terrible voice. "You bleed the peasants and kill our Ba Lu! Our county government has ordered me to finish you today! Turn your back!"

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* The sleds resemble dog sleds without the dogs. The driver stands in the back and straddles the runners. Between his legs he holds a ten-foot long bamboo pole, with a spike on the end of it. Digging the spike into the ice and grasping the top of the pole with both hands, with each heave the driver sends the sled shooting forward at remarkable speed.

Cockeye's face drained of color. He opened his mouth to speak, but before he had a chance to get a word out, Twur put a bullet through his brain.

The other puppet was trembling violently with terror.

"You don't have to be afraid," said Shwang, for he was the skinny little "driver". "We only kill the worst ones. As long as you promise not to help the enemy any more, we'll let you go."

The puppet swore he wanted nothing better than to return home and be an ordinary citizen. Shwang and Twur lectured him a while, then said that if he would help them with something first they would see to it that he got his wish.

That night, rifles in hand, the guerrillas surrounded the fortress. Wearing Cockeye's uniform, and preceded by the captured puppet, Shwang walked boldly to the foot of the battlements.

"Let down the drawbridge," called the puppet. "The Captain has come back!"

The bridge was lowered and Shwang calmly walked across. Without a word, he whipped out his pistol and covered the startled soldiers. Twur and the guerrillas, quickly following, disarmed the dazed puppets. The capture was completed without a shot being fired.

After collecting all the military equipment from the puppets, the guerrillas ordered them to return to their homes. The fortress was burned to the ground.

*

One day at noon, four guerrillas dressed as fishermen set out in a couple of sleds which were loaded with wicker baskets and ice choppers. The men's cloth shoes, bound with strips of leather to protect them from the moisture, were studded with spikes. Da-shwey and Twur, holding five-pronged spears, each stood in the front of their respective craft. Straddling the runners in the back, Shwang and Jow the fisherman shot the sleds skimming across the ice with rythmic heaves of their long bamboo poles.

Running parallel with the bank of the lake, they reached a point about fifty yards off the village of Little Creek. They were noticed by a puppet soldier standing guard outside the gate of its fortress. He was intrigued by a large carp still wriggling strongly on the end of Twur's spear. The guerrillas leisurely poled their sleds before his avid eyes.

"Hey, fishermen! Come over here!" he shouted.

"We're busy," Twur called back. "What's on your mind?"

The puppet ran along the shore to keep up with them. "Mother's — ! Come over here! I want to see what you've got!"

The two sleds pulled into the bank at a big willow tree a good distance from the fortress. The puppet soldier came panting up and pointed at Twur's fish.

"Let me have that thing," he said. "My commander loves fish. I'll give you the money later."

"Take it easy, friend," replied Twur. "We promised this fish to the fortress further down. We'll let you have the next big one we catch."

"Maybe you'd like some of the fish we've got in here," suggested Shwang indicating one of the large wicker baskets. "See if there's one you want."

TENG SHU: We Sign for Peace

TENG SHU: We Sign for Peace

"I must have a big one," cautioned the puppet and leaned into the basket to look.

Shwang poked him in the ribs with a pistol. "Don't make a sound!" The puppet's jaw dropped in astonishment, while Twur relieved him of his rifle.

"If you speak up, you have nothing to be afraid of," said Shwang. "We're Chinese and we don't kill other Chinese. Now tell us — where are the men stationed in the fortress? Where are the arms kept?"

The puppet's teeth were chattering noisily. "I — I — I'll speak! Spare my life. All the men are on the ground floor in the n-n-north wing! The commander is afraid we'll desert; he's got the guns locked up in the east r-r-room!"

Several other sleds loaded with guerrillas approached and Shwang hailed them. "Come on! Let's deliver some fish!"

Leaving one man behind to guard the puppet, they went ashore and walked to the fortress. Da-shwey and Twur held carp in their left hands, while their heavy padded robes, carried carelessly over their right arms, concealed their Mauser pistols. The other men following behind wore their guns strapped to their chests beneath their jackets.

The guerrillas walked through the gate which the captured sentry had been guarding and went directly to the north wing. Puppet soldiers, stripped to the waist and picking lice from their clothes, were sitting around the stove.

Da-shwey and Twur entered the east room and found the commander with a white towel around his neck. A barber was shaving his head.

The commander glanced up at them out of the corners of his eyes. "Ah, you've brought some fish!"

Twur dropped the robe from his arm and pointed his gleaming pistol at the commander's forehead. "Yes, and we brought this too!"

The Commander with one half of his head shaven stared at them idiotically. The barber dropped his razor in fright. Other guerrillas entered and collected the puppets' guns from their racks. Da-shwey and Twur bound the puppet leader.

"This is no concern of yours," they said to the barber. "Why don't you go home?"

The barber could tell from their tone of voice that they were Ba Lu. He gathered together his equipment and left smiling.

Da-shwey's brother Ru and Jow the fisherman spotted a number of puppet soldiers, with robes over their uniforms, trying to sneak out of the west room where they had been hiding.

"Anyone who runs is going to eat black dates!" warned Ru.

Before long, the commander and all his soldiers were lined up on the shore in front of the fortress. Some peasants who had come by from the village were deliriously happy when they saw what was going on. They brought the sleds from the big willow tree and helped the guerrillas load the prisoners and war trophies.

One sled was left for Da-shwey and Twur who remained behind to set fire to the fortress. The peasants brought old reed mats and dry stalks to give the blaze a good start. Quickly roaring through the wooden floors of the buildings, the flames set off some hand grenades that had been overlooked. Their thunderous explosions brought other peasants to the scene.

"When was the Ba Lu here?" asked one of them with a grin. "I didn't even see them, and the damn fortress is gone!"

*

The same day, Blacky Tsay arrived at the guerrilla headquarters. Many of the county officials had been ordered to district government levels to lead the struggle against the enemy. Blacky was sent to work with Shwang's organization.

In the evening, after reviewing the local situation with the guerrillas, Blacky recommended an attack on the fortress in the village of Big Poplar. This puppet stronghold was one of the most troublesome thorns in the side of the resistance movement; it had to be destroyed. The guerrillas were more than willing to undertake the task, for the traitor garrison commander was the hated Jinlung, with Lyew acting as his second in command. If Jinlung could be captured, they said, then Da-shwey could be revenged!

But the sly Jinlung seldom left Big Poplar, and his fortress was extremely well guarded. The strongly made buildings were encircled with two rows of barbed-wire fences, within which, during the day, puppet soldiers maintained constant patrols. At night the gate of the high-walled compound was locked securely, and fierce dogs were released in the outer yard. On every roof of the fortress sentries were stationed. Jinlung kept close tab on the villagers; there was no one the guerrillas could think of who might assist them. There didn't seem to be any way of evolving a feasible plan.

"My mother's relatives live in Big Poplar," said Mey. "Suppose I go in and take a look?"

Da-shwey was doubtful. "I don't know . . . I hear your uncle is working as a servant in the fortress. What if he reports you?"

Some of the other guerrillas also were opposed, but Mey kept insisting. Even if she couldn't accomplish anything, she said, at least it wouldn't do any harm to try. Finally, Blacky decided to let her go.

That night, after being escorted to the outskirts of Big Poplar she stealthily entered the village.

Three days later, Mey still hadn't returned. The men were becoming anxious. Nyur was so worried that she cried. Blacky, too, was afraid that something had gone wrong.

"If she doesn't come back tonight," he said, "we'll have to go in after her."

In the little headquarters room, the guerrillas waited until well past midnight. And then Mey returned!

Her cheeks were like cold bright red apples and the hair which peeked out from her head kerchief was white with frost. But her big eyes danced as she surveyed her friends.

"Get a scissor," she said to Nyur as she unhooked her heavy padded outer robe.

"What's the trick?" asked Nyur with a laugh.

"My hands are frozen," said Mey. "Cut open this corner of the hem, and you'll find a piece of paper. Give it to Blacky."

Nyur complied as requested. The men crowded around Blacky, puzzling over a sheet of coarse paper marked with lines, circles, and squares.

"What kind of a game is it?" laughed one of the guerrillas.

"With that little 'game' we'll be able to take the fortress!" replied Mey smiling. She indicated with her finger as she explained. "From south to north: here is the lake. This is the dyke; then flat land; then a deep moat. You cross this drawbridge to another stretch of land. These two wavy lines are barbed wire — higher than a man. Here's a wire fence with a big lock on its gate. Inside the gate, these five circles are five dogs. If you get past them, there's the stone wall of the compound itself. Here is the door. Jinlung personally has the key to its lock. Through the door, you come to the first courtyard. On the north side lives one squad of puppets. This triangle on the roof means a pillbox. There's a man on guard there day and night. Still going north, you come to the second courtyard. This big circle in the middle is the tower fort. It's thirty feet high — three stories. Twenty-four hours a day there's a sentry on the roof. Lyew lives on the third floor. One squad lives on the second floor. North again is courtyard number three. Jinlung lives in the east building. His guard sleeps outside his door. The west wing is empty. A two-story building forms the north wall. Another squad lives in its upper story. The whole compound is inside a high wall about ten feet thick. . . . "

"Hi! Don't keep us in suspense!" interrupted Nyur impatiently. "You still haven't said how we're going to get in!"

"It's going to be a mother's — job to do!" said Da-shwey.

"Take it easy!" laughed Mey. "Let me finish. There's still a fourth courtyard north of number three that used to be connected to it, but the door between them now is walled up. The two-story building on the north end of number three at one time had two windows on the upper floor facing north into courtyard number four, but they've been bricked in too. . . . "

"You talk and talk, but you still haven't said how we're going to get in!" fretted Nyur.

"I'm coming to that," said Mey. "It's through one of those windows. The bricks were laid without using cement — they can be removed!"

"What about the squad you said lives on that floor?" asked Shwang.

"Their room is on the west end of the floor. The window I mean is on the east end, where the stairs reach the upper floor."

"What about this fourth courtyard?" asked Da-shwey. "What kind of a place is it?"

"It's empty now except for an old caretaker. There's an entrance to it at the north end. Coming through its gate, if we hug the wall, we can get right up to the rear of the building with the bricked windows without the sentry on the tower seeing us."

"Haya! If we take the fortress you'll deserve the credit," commended Blacky. "You've done a great piece of work!"

"I got all this information from my uncle who works in the fortress. I had an awful time getting him to talk!" laughed Mey.

They sat up until dawn discussing a plan of attack. Ru and Nyur were sent out to round up some more of the guerrillas.

*

By the following night, everything was in readiness. It was so dark you couldn't see the man in front of you. Carrying a ladder and a short hand-saw with a slim narrow blade, the group proceeded to a thicket of reeds to the west of the village of Big Poplar.

Mey had a small bottle of oil. "I'll go ahead. You wait here," she said.

"Can you do it alone?" asked Shwang. "Shouldn't I go with you?"

"No. I can manage it better by myself," Mey insisted.

She entered the village cautiously and walked to the north gate of the fourth courtyard. It was open. Silently, she stole in and hid among the weeds in a corner of the neglected garden. Her uncle had told her that the old caretaker locked the gate every night after supper and retired. Sure enough, about half an hour later, an old man emerged from a small room in which an oil lamp was burning, crossed the courtyard and closed the squeaking gate. After setting the crossbar across it, he went back to his room. The lamp went out.

Mey waited another few minutes, then stole to the gate and drenched its hinges with the oil she had brought. She removed the crossbar, slipped out the gate and returned to the reed thicket outside the village.

"The gate's open," she said. "We can go now."

Moving quickly through the inky night, Mey led the guerrillas to the fourth courtyard. To permit the entrance of the ladder, they pushed the gate wide. It swung open without a sound. Hugging the east wall of the compound, they crept through weeds which grew higher than their heads to the rear of the building that formed the north wall of courtyard number three. They placed the ladder under the bricked-up window in the east section of the building.

Although without cement, the bricks were tightly set. First rubbing a piece of raw garlic on the small hand-saw to make it slide silently, the men cut out a section of the top of the wooden window frame. Once this opening was created, it was a simple matter to lift out the bricks and hand them, one by one, down the ladder.

Shwang climbed in through the window to reconnoiter. He found himself on a stair landing at the end of a corridor. He tip-toed down the hall to the room where a squad of puppet soldiers were sleeping, and listened outside the door. They were all snoring peacefully. Treading lightly, he descended the stairs into the third courtyard. Jinlung's room in the east wing was dark; Shwang proceeded to the second courtyard. There were lights burning on the second floor of the tower, but the only sound to be heard came from the sentry on the roof who was whistling a cheerful tune.

Shwang walked into the first courtyard. The squad of soldiers in the one-story building on the north side were sleeping like the dead. There was no sign of any activity in the pill-pox on the roof. Shwang went back to the guerrillas and reported what he had found.

They split into four groups of five men each. The first group went with Jow the fisherman to courtyard number one. The second, led by Blacky Tsay and Shwang, took its position at the foot of the tower in courtyard number two. Da-shwey led the third group opposite the door of Jinlung's room in the east wing of courtyard number three. The fourth, which included Da-shwey's brother Ru, remained on the second floor of the building through which they

had entered. Everyone was to wait until Blacky had disposed of the sentry on the top of the tower, then all would strike at the same time.

Shwang and Blacky and their men entered the brightly lit second story of the tower. Like dead pigs, sleeping puppet soldiers sprawled about the room. Leaving the three guerrillas behind, Shwang and Blacky took an oil lamp and ascended to the third floor. On all the walls, weapons were hanging from pegs. Off to one side, his chin pointed to the ceiling and his mouth open wide, Lyew lay snoring loudly. Shwang remained with him; Blacky started up the stairs to the roof, with a Mauser in his hand.

"Who's there?" called the sentry.

"It's me," said Blacky, taking two steps at a time.

"Who are you?"

"It's me, who do you think it is?" laughed Blacky.

"Are you my relief?"

Blacky reached the top of the stairs and started through the pitch black toward the glow of the sentry's cigarette. The puppet, who was holding a big double-barreled shotgun in his arms, had his hands in his sleeves to shelter them from the cold. Before the sentry knew what was happening, Blacky yanked the shotgun from his arms and covered him with the Mauser.

"Don't move!" shouted Blacky. "Behave yourself and you'll be all right!"

Almost as an echo to his command, the cry "Don't move!" rang out in every one of the courtyards.

The sentry preceded Blacky docilely down the stairs to the third floor. Shwang was prodding Lyew with a rifle and roaring, "Get up! Get up!"

Lyew's eyes were still drugged with sleep. "What are you making such a row for?" he grumbled. "I've got to get a little rest once in a while!"

Shwang took him by the ear and dragged him to his feet. When Lyew saw the two guerrilla leaders standing before him, he stared at them in horrified disbelief. Wide awake now, he obeyed their order to walk ahead of them to the second floor.

A squad of puppets was standing uneasily lined up against one side of the room. They looked as if they had dressed very hastily. Their rifles were already slung across the backs of the guerrillas who were guarding them. A few of the puppets who recognized Blacky and Shwang nodded and bowed in fervent greeting.

"Commander! District Leader! We've been looking forward to your coming!"

"Good!" laughed Blacky. "Get your bedding and equipment together and let's go outside!"

Just then Da-shwey and Twur, hot and flustered, rushed up the stairs.

"Is Jinlung here?" they asked.

"What do you mean?" said Blacky, startled. "Isn't he in his room?"

"The only one we found was the kid who serves as his bodyguard," replied Da-shwey. "We searched everyone of the courtyards from top to bottom, but there's no sign of Jinlung!"

"How can it be!" cried Twur, stamping his foot in exasperation. "Mother's —! Even the little bodyguard says he doesn't know anything!"

Shwang led Lyew over to one side and spoke to him in a friendly manner. "Lyew," he said quietly, "You're sure to know. Where is Jinlung?"

Lyew scratched his head; he looked at them stupidly. "I can't say exactly."

Twur angrily grabbed him by the throat. "You filthy bastard!" he yelled. "Are you still trying to play traitor? Speak up or I'll strangle you!"

"Let me go!" whimpered Lyew, his eyes white with fear. "I'll talk! I'll talk!"

Twur contemptuously released him.

"I'm sure he's with a woman, but I don't know which one," Lyew whispered. "You should ask his little bodyguard. The kid escorts him wherever he goes and calls for him and brings him back. He's the one who knows!"

Blacky ordered that the prisoners and the captured arms and munitions be assembled in the third courtyard. Together with Da-shwey, Twur and Lyew, he went to question the little bodyguard.

Hanging his head and with tears running down his cheeks, the boy insisted he didn't know where to find Jinlung. Blacky could tell the lad was frightened. He sat down beside him and put a big hand soothingly on the boy's shoulder.

"How did you get here, little brother?"

Without raising his head, his underlip protruding in a pout, the youngster replied, "I came in place of my father to work as a servant for a few days. But Jinlung wouldn't let me leave!"

"Ah, so that's the way it is! That traitor bastard Jinlung is just like the Japs — he persecutes us Chinese! Tell me where that guy is, and we'll catch him! You'll be free and there'll be one less traitor harming our people! What do you say?"

The boy turned his tear-stained face to Blacky. "I — I — don't dare," he sobbed. "If he finds out, he'll kill me!"

"You can stay with us from now on. We'll protect you." Blacky assured him. "There's nothing to fear."

That was what the little bodyguard hoped to hear. He brushed away his tears with a grimy hand. "All right," he declared bravely. "I'll lead you to him!"

*

Leaving Shwang in charge of the fortress, Blacky and about half of the guerrillas followed the boy to the house of a young widow with whom Jinlung was spending the night. Jow and Ru were posted at the front gate of the small compound; Da-shwey and Twur guarded the rear exit; Blacky and the rest of the men climbed to the roof with the boy.

Jinlung was in bed playing with the widow when he heard the footsteps on the roof. He realized immediately that something was wrong.

"They've come to grab us!" he whispered excitedly. "Get dressed quickly! I'll protect you and we'll escape!"

The young widow was faint with terror. They hastily put their clothes on. Taking his pistol, Jinlung propelled the woman to the door.

The compound was built in the usual hollow square of one-story buildings. The men on the roof of the building opposite the one which contained Jinlung, had their guns trained and waiting. Jinlung softly drew the bolt of the lock. He flung open the door, and with one motion fired at the guerrillas and thrust the widow into the courtyard. In the dark, the men thought she was Jinlung. They returned a volley that riddled her body. Without a sound she toppled over dead.

Jinlung dashed across the courtyard and through the front gate of the compound. As Jow raised his rifle to shoot, Ru, wanting to capture Jinlung alive, knocked it aside, and leaped forward to grapple with the traitor. Jinlung felled him with one blow of his fist and ran off into the darkness with Jow in hot pursuit. Neither of them slackening pace, they turned and twisted through the narrow lanes. Jow sent a shot whistling close to Jinlung's head. The traitor returned the fire but his aim was wild. Both men breathing heavily, the chase left the village and reached the frozen lake. Jinlung ran on to the ice with Jow pounding steadily behind him.

"Stop! Jinlung!" shouted the guerrilla. "You're a Chinese — surrender and you won't be killed!"

"Let me go, Jow!" cried Jinlung, as he fled. "I promise to reward you!"

Grinding his teeth with hate, Jow dropped to one knee, aimed and fired at the dark shadow in front of him. A searing pain tore through Jinlung's left shoulder; he staggered but kept to his feet. Before Jow had a chance to fire again, Jinlung, with one lucky shot of his Mauser, killed him. . . .

Guided by the sound of the firing, Blacky and the guerrillas hurried to the lake. They could see very little in the stygian darkness and walked cautiously across the ice. One of the guerrillas spotted a dim form crouched a few yards ahead; the men quickly kneeled, leveling their rifles. But when the figure neither moved nor replied to their calls, they approached and saw that it was Jow.

Da-shwey lit the composition handle of a toothbrush. In the light of its white glaring flame, they examined the body of the young fisherman. The slim Jow had one eye closed as if he were still aiming at the enemy. He was already stiff, and the blood which had flowed from his pierced heart had formed a pool beneath his chest that glued him to the crimson ice.

"Jow was a fine man," said Blacky sadly.

Da-shwey cried openly at the loss of his dear friend, and tears from the eyes of many of the guerrillas dropped on the frozen surface of the lake. Every man present swore an angry vow that Jow the fisherman would be avenged!

The lake threw back a fiery red reflection of the huge flames leaping high into the black sky over Big Poplar. Shwang's squad and the peasants were destroying the fortress.

On the horizon, in villages to the east, pinpoints of fire sprouted into blazing pillars. On the eastern bank of the Bayang Lake, enemy strongholds were burning.

Chapter XII

Last Drop of Blood — Spring - Autumn, 1943

After his escape, Jinlung fled to Shenjya which was held by Japs and puppets. He had his wound attended to and rested for a week at the fortress with his friend Gwo. Then he moved to the big walled town occupied by the Japs.

The guerrillas, after teaching the captured puppets for three days, let them all go, including Lyew.

When the blustery spring winds began to blow, the ice thawed in the Bayang Lake. Guerrilla activity intensified; a great many more fortresses were captured and destroyed. The enemy constantly pressed peasants into labor battalions to rebuild the ruined strongholds; but the people and the Ba Lu were of one mind. Somehow the repairs were never finished — for what the peasants were forced to build during the day, they demolished at night. There was nothing the Japs could do about it.

Gradually, the Ba Lu gained control of the majority of the villages in the Bayang Lake section. Even in those places which still had not been taken over, most of the puppets were secretly acting on orders from the guerrillas.

The greatest sources of difficulty were the city, the big walled town, and one or two villages like Shenjya where there was direct Jap occupation. From those places the enemy would sally forth into the countryside and make requisitions of supplies from the peasants.

In order to protect the people, the Communist Party sent men to every village to act as "intermediaries" with the Japs. They pretended to be local officials who were willing to cooperate. Puppet civil administrative offices were packed with the progressives of the villages. The Japs had no idea how many of the people with whom they were dealing had Communist bones!

The resistance policy was: Whenever the enemy wants anything, don't give it to him, or give it to him late, or give him less than he demands. The peasants had innumerable means of fooling the enemy and of covering his eyes and ears.

In the autumn, after the harvest, Gwo's puppets went to several villages, demanding two tons of white flour and two tons of fish from each. The "cooperative" officials complained that they could never raise such a large amount, and delayed making delivery. Finally Gwo wrote an order saying that unless delivery was made in twenty-four hours, his men would wipe out every living thing in the villages so that not even a dog or a chicken would be left.

When the deadline passed and the supplies were not forth-coming, puppets and Japs left Shenjya in their boats and headed toward the recalcitrant villages. Half-way across the lake, they met three small barges loaded with fish and flour.

"Where are you going?" hailed the soldiers.

"We're from Big Poplar," replied a little old man. "We're sending this stuff to your fortress."

Gwo looked at the supplies disapprovingly. "Why is there so little?" he demanded.

The old man squinted his eyes. "Eh, to scrape together even this much wasn't easy! There's hardly any wheat land in the lake section. This year everyone's so hungry — who can fish? The village officials worked day and night collecting. They beat gongs in the streets and shouted themselves hoarse. You go see for yourself — they're still trying!"

The Japs cursed vigorously and Gwo glared at the old man. "Mother's — ! Stop wasting time! Hurry up and deliver your load!"

"Certainly, certainly, Commander!" nodded the peasant. "We're on our way!" The bargemen dug in their oars and pulled in the direction of Shenjya. But no

sooner were they out of sight of the enemy than they changed their course and rowed deep into a thicket of reeds. There, they made themselves comfortable and went to sleep.

Gwo and his men found Big Poplar full of noise and strife. Men were going from door to door collecting things. Two officials staggered by carrying a large wicker basket full of old bedding, children's pants, old ladies' hats — a jumbled assortment of articles.

The enemy watched these proceedings in amazement. From one of the houses an official emerged carrying a broken hoe. He was closely followed by an old man who dropped to his knees, crying at the official's feet.

"Please," begged the old man, "don't take my hoe! I inherited it from my father and I've used it all these years! . . . I can't plant without it, we'll starve!"

"What do you want with all this junk?" Gwo asked the collector, whose name was Mi.

"Why, don't you know, Commander?" replied the official fretfully. "There isn't a family in the village that has anything decent! We have to take this old stuff! We're going to sell it for whatever we can get and use the money to buy flour for you!"

As he was talking, down the street another racket started. A collector and an old woman were shouting and fighting over the possession of an iron cauldron. The man struck the old woman hard in the face and she rolled howling to the ground.

As Mi continued to bemoan the poverty of the village, he slipped a wad of bills into Gwo's hand.

"Everyone knows how hard the Commander works for the benefit of the people," he whispered. "We managed to raise a little spending money!"

With an innocent expression, Gwo tucked the bills out of sight. He said a few words to the Japs who shook their heads in bewilderment. After the peasants were assembled for a short lecture on the fulfilment of duty, the enemy departed.

When they arrived back at the fortress in Shenjya, it was discovered that the three barges never delivered the provisions. Furious, the Japs swore they would level Big Poplar the next day. But early the following morning, Mi appeared, full of resentment.

"You've seen our village, so I don't have to tell you what a hard time we're having," he complained to Gwo. "If you thought the flour and fish we sent you yesterday weren't enough, why didn't you talk to us about it? What's the idea of detaining the men and the boats? How can I explain this to the people in my village?"

"Ai! Hard luck!" said Gwo with a sinking heart. "Those provisions never came! The Ba Lu must have got them!"

Mi sighed and looked so convincingly mournful that one of the Jap officers tried to comfort him.

"Ba Lu, big disgusting! Village man good! Tomorrow Imperial Army find Ba Lu, kill all dead-dead!"

Mi made the Jap a deep bow. "Yes, yes! Kill all dead-dead!" He left, scarcely able to contain his laughter.

Blow after blow staggered the Jap "punitive army". On one occasion, three military barges loaded with rice, reed mats, and duck eggs left the enemy controlled city. Their ultimate destination was Tientsin. Before they could sail out of Bayang Lake, they fell into a guerrilla ambush. There were over twenty Jap casualties — dead, wounded and prisoners. In addition, the guerrillas captured two Czech type light machine guns and one heavy Maxim. Thereafter, the Japs seldom dared to venture out on the lake.

On the autumn festival day, the puppet rural administrative authority, making a drive for grain collection, summoned all the village mayors to Shenjya for a meeting. The mayor of Big Poplar, ostensibly a puppet but actually working for the Ba Lu, still hadn't returned the night after the conference. Blacky Tsay and a number of the guerrillas were waiting for him in the courtyard of a Ba Lu peasant.

A full golden moon, slowly emerging above the tree tops beyond the wall, flooded the compound with its soft light. Mey and Nyur handed out grapes, pears, peanuts and dates which the peasants had sent. Shwang and Twur soon had everyone limp with laughter at their performance of a bit from a farce.

Only Da-shwey, seated on the high doorstep in the shadows, seemed listless and dejected. Shwang pulled him forward and tried to get him to sing, but he said his throat was sore and made one excuse after another until the little leader had to give up.

Da-shwey had been very depressed lately. Still weak from the terrible tortures to which he had been subjected, he spit blood if he worked too hard. In the midst of the others' gaiety, he was thinking of the brutal destruction of his father, and he miserably huddled back in the shadows.

Mey sat down beside him and took his hand. "What's wrong?" she whispered gently. "Are you in pain?"

"It's nothing, really."

Twur noticed them sitting by themselves. "You know what I think?" he asked in a loud arch voice. "I think Da-shwey wants to get married!"

Da-shwey made some embarrassed negative noises.

Blacky had been aware of Da-shwey's unhappy frame of mind for some time and was extremely sorry for him. Now, he thought Twur's jest actually was an excellent idea.

"What do you say?" asked Blacky smiling. "Shall we find you a sweetheart?"

Shwang ran forward waving his hand. "We don't have to search!" he protested cheerfully. "There's one ready-made right before your eyes!"

Of one accord, everyone's glance turned to Mey. Flustered, she lowered her head and became very busy shelling peanuts.

Nyur dragged her into the open. "I think she's the one! Do we all agree?"

All laughed and shouted that they agreed!

"What's your idea, Mey?" chuckled Blacky.

Mey's heart pounded furiously and her face was scarlet. She was too shy to say that she agreed, but she certainly didn't want to say that she disagreed! Mey evaded the question with a laugh.

"I'm afraid he doesn't like me enough!"

Ru pulled his brother forward. "Do you like her or not?" he demanded. From all sides the friends echoed the question; they refused to let Da-shwey escape.

There was no alternative but for him to admit sheepishly, "I've liked her for a long time!" while everyone whooped with approval.

They'll make the best possible couple, thought Blacky. I must help them get married!

Just then, a peasant arrived with news that dampened the merriment of the guerrillas. He reported that all the mayors who had gone to attend the meeting in Shenjya had been arrested. The puppet government had announced that unless the villages fulfilled their grain requisition quotas within ten days, the mayors would be shot.

The news was greeted with a stunned silence. Finally, Blacky spoke.

"I'm afraid the only way we can solve this problem is to work through some of the people in the puppet government."

But they all knew that the success of this method would be very doubtful. The Japs had erected an enormous tower fortress in Shenjya and it was maintained with the strictest military rigor. Shen, the former mayor, now had his office in the village as the head of the district puppet rural administrative authority. It had always been hard to get along with him, for he was an ambitious person, super-sensitive to the changes in the tides of battle. When the advantage was with the Japanese, his attitude to the underground became distant. Recently, Ho's son Goupi had gone to Shenjya to assist the fortress commander Gwo as the head of his spy organization. This move was part of the Japs' campaign to wipe out the Ba Lu workers in the villages. Goupi performed his duties with such cruel efficiency that it was now very difficult for a stranger even to enter Shenjya.

"The arrested mayors must be freed," said Blacky. "If the Japs kill them, it'll be doubly hard for us to carry on our work in the future. We have to send someone to talk to Shen, both about helping us to rescue the mayors and on the whole question of cracking the enemy hold on this region. Their grip has to be broken!"

Immediately, a dozen men volunteered to risk the trip to Shenjya.

"Even if it were a mountain of knives I would get through!" cried Twur.

"The place is like a garden to me," said Da-shwey. "When we first took control, my hands gave it birth and made it grow. I must be the one to win it back!"

"I think I had better go," said Shwang. "If I fail, you'll have your chance."

After thinking it over, Blacky decided to let Shwang make the first attempt. The following night, the little weaver sneaked into Shenjya.

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As he proceeded cautiously through the village, far down the street Shwang saw Goupi and his spy patrol coming in his direction. Shwang, agile as a monkey, quickly slipped into a side lane, but in the bright moonlight Goupi had glimpsed his flitting shadow. Shouting, the gang of spies began the pursuit.

Shwang twisted and turned through the narrow alleys. He planned to lead them in a wide circle and escape from the village the way he came in, but as

luck would have it, he ran down one lane and found himself face to face with a dead end. He could already hear the footsteps of his pursuers thumping after him through the entrance to the lane. Trapped, he looked about quickly for a peasant's home where he could find refuge, but every door was locked fast. He saw one compound which had been destroyed by fire, its gate sagging on its hinges. Shwang dashed in and hid himself in the one building still standing, on the west side of the courtyard. The roof and the windows of the house had been gutted by the blaze, but the mud brick walls would afford some protection. Panting, he drew his Mauser and waited. He could hear Goupi shouting, "This is a dead end! Search every house! The son of a bitch can't get away!"

The sound of the puppets banging on doors, running back and forth, cursing, rang through the lane. A familiar voice said, "I'm going to take a look in there!" and someone came into the destroyed compound. Looking through the window, Shwang recognized Lyew walking toward him in the moonlight.

Lyew played the beam of his flashlight in every dark corner of the courtyard. Shwang flattened himself against the wall next to the door. When Lyew entered the wrecked building, he threw one arm around the traitor's throat and dug his pistol into his ribs.

"Don't make a sound!" hissed Shwang, "We were good to you last time, but you're doing this kind of dirty business again! I'll forgive you once more, but you've got to help me!"

"This isn't my idea," protested Lyew, shaking with fear. "They forced me to do it!"

"Don't worry," said Shwang grimly. "If I wanted to kill you, you'd be dead by now! We're both Chinese and I want to save my bullets for the Japs! I'm letting you go. If you have half the heart of a Chinese, you'll say that there's no one in here! If you lead them here to take me I may die, but I promise that you won't live either! I'll die for the Chinese people. Who will you die for? Think it over!"

"Let me go. I swear I won't betray you!" Lyew assured him fervently. When Shwang released him, he scooted out like a rabbit.

"It looks bad!" Shwang muttered to himself. He trained his Mauser through the window at the entrance to the courtyard.

In the lane outside, Lyew ran into Gulu, who had also gone over to the traitors and was a member of the spy gang.

"We can't find him! It's very strange!" said Gulu. "Is there anyone in that compound?"

"Nobody!" replied Lyew. "I just looked!"

Goupi's men had turned all the neighboring peasants' houses inside out, without being able to discover any sign of the stranger. Only the ruined courtyard was left.

"Has this place been searched?" asked Goupi. Someone said that it probably had, but Goupi waved his men forward with his pistol. "Search again! Search again! I don't believe that he sprouted wings and flew out of here!"

Three puppets, guns in hand, entered the compound.

There's no way out of this place, thought Shwang. I'll give them everything I've got! He aimed carefully and fired. One puppet fell dead in his tracks; the other two turned tail and fled.

"Good!" shouted Goupi. "He's in there! All charge together and take him alive!"

But not one of the traitors could be induced to go into the courtyard.

Concealed beside the window, in spite of the tenseness of the situation the shadow of a smile flickered across Shwang's thin face as he listened to Goupi's futile exhortations. Ha! he thought with a snort, that bastard talks too big! Take me alive, eh? They'll never do that ! The one I just killed pays the price for my life, but if I shoot straight, I'll earn some more of their mother's — "capital"!

Fearless and full of confidence, Shwang aimed steadily at the compound entrance.

Goupi could see that his men, in spite of their bluster, were scared to death. He ranted at them furiously, but no one would move. Beside himself, he prodded them viciously with his rifle.

"Charge! Charge! Why don't you charge?" he howled.

"It's no good, Commander," replied one of the puppets weakly. "We can't see him, but the moon is very bright and in that open courtyard he can pick us off easy! It's suicide to go in there!"

Goupi himself was afraid to take the lead. He dispatched a man to the fortress to bring reinforcements.

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About eighty Jap and puppet soldiers arrived and took up positions on the roofs of the buildings surrounding the compound. On the building directly opposite the ruins in which Shwang was hiding, a machine gun was set up. From that vantage point, acting on Gwo's instructions, Gulu and a couple of other puppets shouted enticements.

"Come out quickly! You're surrounded! Where can you run to?"

"Throw away your gun and come out! Surrender and join the Imperial Forces! It's much better than that poor Ba Lu!"

Gulu tried a long speech. "Wey! You, inside there — listen! There's a machine gun pointing at your head! What kind of a stake have you got up your arse that's making you so stiff? I've eaten the food of the Ba Lu. What's so fragrant or sweet about it? They're very strict with you; you get no money. Why should you give your life for them? Now that I'm on this side, I've always got a big roll of bills; I eat, drink and play — it's a much better way to live. The best thing for you is to surrender!"

After ten minutes of shouting, there still was not a sound from the ruined house. A puppet crawled to the edge of the roof of the building opposite and lifted himself half over the parapet to peer into the compound. Shwang smiled, aimed, and squeezed the trigger. With a loud report, the bullet sped through into the brain of the puppet! His body somersaulted through the air and fell thudding into the lane.

That guy is tough! thought the puppets. Their courage left them and they flattened their bellies to the roof, not daring to move.

Angrily, the Japs opened fire with the machine gun. A hail of bullets cut through the mud walls; splinters of wood flew from the window sill. Inside, dried mud dropped to the floor in chunks. Shwang could see that the walls would

soon collapse. Then, flying lead smashed the right side of his jaw and put two holes in his shoulder. The wounds bled freely; sparks seemed to dance before his eyes as he collapsed beneath the window. Excitement and fatigue brought on his old ailment — a brackish taste seared his throat and he coughed blood.

Shwang knew the enemy would rush him soon. He gathered his ebbing strength, struggled to his knees and unfastened the two small round hand grenades fixed to his belt. Crawling beside the open doorway, he forced his heavy eyes to stare across the courtyard.

The machine gun was silent. Then, as expected, a group of Japs came pouring into the compound. The explosion of Shwang's first grenade killed two Japs and sent the others reeling back, wounded. Again they rushed him and again his grenade blasted them out of the courtyard.

Now, all that Shwang had left was one bullet in his pistol.

The enemy was enraged. So many men couldn't cope with one Ba Lu! They had suffered more than ten casualties, dead and wounded. No matter how they attacked they came out the loser! A hasty council of war was called and they worked out a dirty "Jap trick". The men brought vast quantities of brush and wood to the roofs. They planned to set fire to it, fling it into the compound and burn man and house to ashes!

His clothes soaked with blood and sweat, Shwang leaned crookedly against the inside of the crumbling wall. Weakening fast, he was bitter against himself for not having carried out his task in Shenjya.

From the roof, Goupi cursed him angrily. "I — your eighteen generations of ancestors! Are you coming out or not? In a minute we're going to roast you to a cinder! If you surrender nicely, we still may spare your dog's life!"

Shwang saw red. He used the last of his draining resources to shout a reply. "Don't bother me with your mother's dog-farts! I'm a Communist . . . die but never surrender! I don't mind dying! Today . . . you paid plenty . . . for this! . . . "

He grinned with what was left of his shattered face. He wanted to heckle them some more, but his jaw was numb and his tongue felt like a piece of wood. His mouth couldn't form the words. He began to lose consciousness.

Then he thought — I can't let my gun fall into the enemy's hands. He still could think with some coherence, and he remembered having heard that if the muzzle of a gun is blocked when fired, its breech would explode. With great effort, he raised the pistol to his mouth and put his tongue into the opening of the icy cold barrel. This way, thought Shwang, I can do the right thing for the Party, for Chairman Mao, and for the people. . . .

Without an instant's hesitation, he pulled the trigger.

Chapter XIII

Into the Tiger's Lair — Autumn, 1943

When news of how Shwang gave his life reached Big Poplar, the guerrillas were deeply grieved. Many of the peasants too had loved the plucky little weaver, and they cried openly. It was impossible to bring back the body, for the enemy had removed it to the city to be photographed for propaganda purposes.

Moved and shocked as he was by the death of his good friend, Blacky was all the more determined to carry out the orders of his superiors to win back control in the occupied territory.

"We Communists must be brave and determined, and not afraid to die," he said to Da-shwey. "If one falls, another must go and try again. Sooner or later, we'll succeed! You know Shenjya thoroughly; I'd like to send you. What do you think — have you got the nerve to go through with it?"

Actually, Da-shwey had serious misgivings about his own ability to carry out so difficult a task in view of the fact that the clever Shwang had failed. But Blacky put it to him on the basis of courage, and he was stung to an unequivocal reply.

"You don't have to 'rouse' me, Blacky!" he growled. "I know how to accept a Party responsibility! If I die, it'll be with honor!"

Twur demanded that he be given the right to go. He started to offer arguments why.

"You men comrades make big targets," interrupted Mey. "You're too easy to spot. I still think it would be better to let a woman take the job. The enemy'd be less likely to notice one of us."

"I've already got the order in my hand," laughed Da-shwey, "and nobody can snatch it away!"

"That's right," said Blacky. "Don't quarrel. Each must do what he's most suited for. There's work for everybody. No one will be idle."

After talking it over, it was decided that Mey would remain in Big Poplar and take care of the organization affairs; the others were assigned to the various villages to make liaison with the puppet civil leaders. Everyone was to report back after three days.

That night, the guerrillas set out for the occupied villages. Profiting by Shwang's experience, Da-shwey planned to start later to avoid running into enemy patrols. At midnight he was ready to leave, but the peasant who had agreed to row him to Shenjya still hadn't appeared, Da-shwey fretted impatiently.

"Don't wait any longer," said Mey. "There are plenty of boats. Everybody's asleep and it'd be hard to find a boatman, so I'll take you!"

"No, thanks! I could help you get me over, but how would you find your way back alone? It's easy to get lost on Bayang Lake!"

"Hmph! If you peer at a person through a crack, he looks flat! Don't be so prejudiced. I was born and brought up here; I don't know how many times I've crossed the lake in a boat. How can I go wrong?"

Reluctantly, Da-shwey consented. They went down to the water's edge and untied a small craft from its mooring.

"You sit in the prow," directed Mey.

"I'll row," said Da-shwey. "How can I let you . . . "

"No," Mey cut in firmly. "Save your strength for your work."

Da-shwey meekly took his seat. Mey stood opposite him and rolled up her sleeves. With one foot forward and one foot back for steadiness, grasping the long oars, she expertly sent the little boat skimming lightly forward. On the surface of the water, the ripples from her strokes broke the placid reflection of the full moon into leaping, dancing, silver flashes.

Soon they reached the wide expanse of the open lake. Not a sound could be heard except the rythmic soft splash of the oars. Enveloped in a peaceful silence, neither of them spoke for a long time.

Finally, Mey said, "Where will you go first when you get there?"

"I was figuring to go to 'Uncle' Li, who lives next door to my old house. What do you think?"

"Mm, I know that old man. He's always been very friendly to the Ba Lu. It's just that I don't know how he is now. . . . When you go to Shen's place, what'll you do if you run into Japs or puppets?"

"I'll check carefully before I go in. Blacky's already told me — Shen's not to be killed unless he's become a hopeless traitor. Only in that case will I shoot and run! If Japs or traitors walk in on us, I'll have to try to kill them. Even if I can't get away, I'll die an honorable death. 'The wheels of the cart leave their tracks behind.' — Shwang will be my model!"

Da-shwey's words squeezed Mey's heart with icy fingers. She rowed silently and looked at him with big shining eyes. There was so much she wanted to tell him, but she couldn't bring herself to speak. For a few moments, both were lost in their own thoughts.

Mey stopped rowing to wipe the perspiration beading her brow. "Da-shwey," she said slowly, "this time you're going into the tiger's mouth to pull a tooth. You must be very careful. Whatever you do, don't give yourself away! Keep your eyes and your ears sharp. If you get in a spot, keep yourself under control! Remember what I'm telling you. . . . When you finish your job, come right back. Don't make us worry about you!"

Da-shwey was thrilled with joy that Mey was so concerned. He looked directly into her lovely eyes and smiled.

"I'm going to do this thing right!" he said confidently. "I'll show that the people's food I've been eating these past few years hasn't been given to me in vain! Blacky's taught me several plans; and I certainly won't forget what you've told me — I can't go wrong! Wait; I'll bring you good news!"

By now they could see the lights burning in the enemy fortress tower in Shenjya. The sound of Jap and puppet voices was already audible across the water; they both stopped talking.

Mey quietly propelled the little boat through a reed thicket to the bank of the dyke a short distance from the village. Da-shwey leaped lightly ashore, turned his head long enough to grin and whisper, "Go back!", and then he was swallowed up by the darkness.

She sat until she no longer could hear his footsteps receding in the distance. Slowly, she brought the boat back to the open water and rowed for home.

Da-shwey crept into the village, hugging the side of the lanes. Noiselessly he stole to Uncle Li's little compound and quickly scaled the low wall. He called softly at the open window but no one answered. Picking up a dried corn stalk, he poked it into the dark room as far as his arm could reach. Inside, someone coughed, but there was no other response.

"It's me, Uncle," whispered Da-shwey. "Open the door!"

As soon as Uncle Li heard the familiar voice, he lifted the latch and let Da-shwey in. He covered the window with a blanket and lit the lamp.

"Heavens! What are you doing here?" the old man asked.

"I've come to see you, Uncle. Tell me, has that 'fort' we dug collapsed yet?"

"No. See for yourself," replied the old man, raising the lamp.

Da-shwey removed some loose bricks from the front of the *kang* and peered in through the opening. It was still intact — the tunnel which led to the *kang* of a neighbor in the next house.

Reassured, Da-shwey questioned the old man at length about what had happened in Shenjya since he left. Uncle Li related in detail all of the events from the death of *Dyeh* to the heroic end of Shwang. He explained the present situation in the village and said that the peasants' houses were constantly searched by the enemy.

"These bastards here turn my stomach!" spat the old man. "I think of you fellows every day; I've been watching for you so hard that my eyes are going blind!" he said affectionately. "But today, at last you've come, Da-shwey! Stay as long as you like. Whatever I have is yours!"

Uncle Li's son and daughter-in-law came in and greeted Da-shwey warmly. They chatted until dawn, when the visitor crawled into the tunnel with a blanket and pillow. There he had his breakfast and went to sleep.

Da-shwey slept soundly until the following evening, then climbed out.

"I'm going to see Shen," he confided to Uncle Li.

"You're looking for him?" asked the old man in astonishment. "He's a big official now — much worse than before!"

"It doesn't matter. I know how to handle him. Anyhow, if something goes wrong, I'll die before I give you away!"

The old man's blue-veined hand tightly gripped the hand of Da-shwey. "Don't talk like that, boy!" he said. "You fellows risk your lives working for us people! What has a poor old man like me got to be afraid of? . . . Where will you look for him?"

"I'm going to his house."

"Wait here 'til I've had a look around, then go."

Taking an empty bottle, Uncle Li went out as if to buy some cooking oil. He returned about twenty minutes later.

"Shen's home. Now's your chance!" he announced, then added, "Why don't we do it this way: I'll go first. You follow a good distance behind me, and my son will cover your rear. If either end runs into any bad eggs, we'll cough. That's the signal for you to get out of sight! All right?"

"That's fine!" said Da-shwey, pleased. "Let's do it that way! If anything happens to me, send word to Big Poplar. . . . "

"You mustn't say those things!" the old man interposed. "Heaven will protect you! Nothing will go wrong!"

"Good, good!" laughed Da-shwey. "Let's go!"

The three men took a circuitous route through the narrow lanes and reached Shen's house without incident. The big black gates to the compound were open. Drawing his Mauser, Da-shwey looked carefully around. He cocked the pistol, removed the safety, then strode in.

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The first courtyard was dark and empty. At the far end, leading to the inner courtyard, was a moon gate through which Da-shwey stepped. Light was shining from the windows of the buildings on the east and west sides of the hollow square. Da-shwey listened at the door of the dark building on the north side. There was no sound. He glided in noiselessly.

Although the ante-room was dark, off to the right, light gleamed under a door curtain; a smell of opium smoke assailed the nostrils. Da-shwey swore softly to himself. Mother's — ! Shen must have invited the puppet leader for an opium session! But why aren't they talking? If he came with bodyguards, I'll shoot them first, then take care of the smokers on the *kang*!

Da-shwey pushed aside the curtain with his pistol and plunged into the room.

Shen was reclining beside a low table on which an opium lamp was burning. Opposite him, his concubine was filling his pipe. Both looked up, startled, at the sound of Da-shwey's entrance. His face paling, Shen propped himself up on one elbow.

"Commander!" he said tremulously. "What are you doing here?"

Da-shwey motioned to him not to rise. "Finish your smoke, then we'll talk."

"I'm all through!" Shen assured him, hastily getting off the *kang*. "Please sit down! I beg your pardon! I know I shouldn't go in for this useless pastime!"

Seeing that Shen was unarmed, Da-shwey uncocked his Mauser and snapped on the safety.

The room was tastefully decorated. The reflection of highly polished black wood furniture gleamed back from several mirrors, Da-shwey's tattered old clothes made a sharp contrast to these elegant surroundings. He pulled up a chair and sat down, placing his pistol on a table next to him.

In her fear and excitement, Shen's concubine had wetted her pants. She was gratefully leaving on shivering legs to fulfil her master's order to bring tea, when Da-shwey stopped her.

"Don't go! I don't want anything to drink!"

Stiffly she resumed her seat. Da-shwey ordered Shen to sit down too and began to question him.

"Who are in the east and west buildings?"

"My daughter-in-law lives in the east wing. In the west is my mother and my wife. There's nobody else."

"Bring them all here! I'll go with you!"

They went into the courtyard. After closing and bolting the main gate, they rounded up the members of Shen's family and brought them to the north building. The women were trembling with terror.

"Have you had your dinner?" they quavered to Da-shwey.

"I've eaten and I'm not thirsty," he responded. "I only want to talk to you. The Ba Lu doesn't recklessly kill people. Don't be afraid."

At his invitation, the women sat down. As if conducting a class, Da-shwey lectured them on the national and international situation and on the united front. Whether they understood or not, they nodded their heads in approval at the proper intervals. When he finished, Da-shwey turned to his host.

"Do you think I'm right, old Shen?"

"Every word is absolutely true!" replied Shen fervently.

"Good! We're all Chinese and we have to stick together as one and fight the Japs. You're in the puppet administration. I want to know what the situation is in the fortress. Do you have the courage to tell me?"

Shen had eyes like a cat; he could see the times were changing. "We're all Chinese, why shouldn't I dare to speak?" he replied staunchly. "I find the puppets' food good to eat but hard to digest. How can a Chinese feel the same as a Jap?"

He itemized the number of men in the fortress, the number of weapons, the names of the officers, the methods used by the spies — Shen told everything he knew.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

"That's about it," nodded Da-shwey. "I'll tell you frankly — this work you've been doing is too dangerous! The Ba Lu felt you had forgotten you were a Chinese, and originally planned to send someone to . . ."

"Commander," Shen hastily interrupted, "I have always been a Chinese at heart!"

"That's fine. Ba Lu policy is generous. As long as you atone for your mistakes by good acts, after victory you'll have a place in society. As the head of the district puppet rural administration, you control thousands of peasants in several villages. You should pretend to cooperate with the Japs, but do everything you can to help the people."

"Yes, yes!" said Shen earnestly. "Whatever is in my power, I'll do my best."

Da-shwey asked him to think of a way to release the arrested village mayors. Shen scratched his head in perplexity.

"The Japs issued the order," he said thoughtfully. "I can't reverse it . . . still . . . since you wish it, no matter how hard it may be, I'll definitely find a means of getting them out!"

"Do it quickly!"

"I'll start the first thing in the morning."

They talked for a while longer, then Da-shwey said, "It's getting late. Let's go to sleep."

"Where are you living?" asked Shen.

"I'm staying at your house tonight. We'll sleep here together."

Shen thought a moment. "I'm afraid someone may come from the fortress. We'd better sleep in that small inner room."

"All right," replied Da-shwey. "I want your family to sleep out here. No one is to leave. If an enemy comes, they're to say that you're not home."

That night, the women occupied the big *kang* in the outer room. The *kang* which Shen and Da-shwey used in the inner room was covered with a bright red blanket, embroidered pillows and a sleek satin coverlet. But Da-shwey couldn't sleep; he was too busy planning and calculating. Besides, he wasn't

sure that Shen wouldn't try to sneak out and call the enemy to seize him. He slipped his gun under his pillow and pretended to sleep. Actually he was listening to every sound.

Shen couldn't sleep either. In his mind, big and little scales were weighing all the pros and cons of his future action. By cock's crow, he had dozed off, but Da-shwey was still wide awake.

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As soon as it was daylight, Da-shwey got up and roused Shen. The latter hopped off the *kang* and started to walk outside.

"Where are you going?" Da-shwey asked.

"I have to relieve myself."

"I want to relieve myself too," said Da-shwey. He went along with Shen.

Before long the whole family was awake and busily preparing breakfast. Shen brought water so that his guest could wash and rinse his mouth.

"You wash first and go, quickly," Da-shwey directed.

Shen complied, then put on a long gown and a fine formal hat. As he was leaving, Da-shwey cautioned him.

"Do a good job. I'll wait here for word from you. Your whole family will be security for my life. If the enemy should come here to take me, I may die, but not one of your family will get away!"

"After all, I'm a Chinese," replied Shen. "You'll see." He went out of the door.

"Why don't you hide in one of the inner rooms?" Shen's mother suggested to Da-shwey.

That's the last thing I want to do! he thought. "I'll sweep the courtyard for you," he replied.

He found a big broom and vigorously went to work. When he finished sweeping, he walked into the front courtyard and fed the ox and the mule. As Da-shwey affectionately watched the big yellow ox munching hay, he was filled with a longing to own such an animal. He patted its neck and thought of how fine it would be to have an ox to pull his plow!

This is a good place, mused Da-shwey, glancing about the front courtyard. I'll bolt the gate and no one will be able to get out. If Shen comes back with soldiers to arrest me, he'll take it for granted I'm still in the rear court, and lead them there directly. That'll give me time either to escape or prepare to defend myself.

He put the heavy crossbar in place across the gate, then sat down in the south room, where he could see any one who tried to leave. A few minutes later, an old servant woman brought him a tray loaded with a plate of fried eggs and several delicacies made of white wheat flour.

"Take it back," Da-shwey ordered. "Do you always feed your workers so well?"

"It's already made," said the old woman unhappily. "Do you want me to prepare something else?"

Rather than cause the servant any more trouble, Da-shwey ate what she had brought. But when she appeared again at noon with a platter of the kind

of food that the average peasant was lucky if he could eat once a year, Da-shwey put his foot down.

"We Ba Lu are used to eating only two meals a day," he said. "It's much too early for me to eat again."

At about three o'clock, Shen knocked at the gate. A servant let him in. Alone and carrying two big carp, Shen went directly to the rear courtyard. The minute he was out of sight, Da-shwey, who had been watching him through the window, lay down and pretended to sleep. Before long, his host entered and shook him.

"You're a brave man to sleep at a time like this," said Shen admiringly.

Da-shwey sat up with a laugh. "I trust you. I know this is a safe place."

"You're a real friend," said Shen, delighted. "Let's go into the inner court and talk."

"Do you think any one will come looking for you from the fortress?"

"Not a chance! They're playing cards!"

When they both were comfortably seated in the guest room, Shen made his report. "I handled the problem just right!" he crowed, smoothing his mustache complacently. "I said to the Jap commander, 'Your excellency! The seven days are up. If we really execute all the mayors, it will only give us a bad name with the people. It would be much better to let the mayors return to work and make them collect grain for us. In the first place, everyone will say that the Imperial Army is benevolent; in the second place, we'll have responsible men in the villages through whom we can get things done!' — I didn't have to talk to him very long before he completely agreed with me! He promised to release the mayors tomorrow! Well, Captain Da-shwey, what do you think of my method?"

Da-shwey commended him warmly and Shen glowed with the compliments. Then a disturbing thought occurred to him.

"We've come through this pass all right, but what'll we do when they demand grain again?"

"One step at a time," smiled Da-shwey. "We'll try to stall them, first. If that doesn't work, we'll think of something else."

Shen pondered a moment. "Very well," he said with a forced laugh. "That's the way it'll be!"

"Do a good job. You know what a hard time the people are having."

That evening, Shen offered a rich repast for dinner. Da-shwey frowned when the expensive dishes were set before him.

"Aiya! This — it's too corrupting! All this food comes from the people's sweat and blood!"

Shen was embarrassed. "Just have this one meal," he urged. "You so seldom have a chance to eat well. Let's say it's a token of my regard for the Ba Lu!"

After some hesitation, Da-shwey consented. During the meal, he explained the principles involved in resisting the enemy, and arranged a means of continuing contact with Shen in the future.

The dinner over, Da-shwey rose from the table. "I have to go back now. Walk with me part of the way."

"All right," said Shen. "If we meet anyone, don't say anything. Let me do the talking."

But their stroll to the outskirts of the village was uneventful. Shen left Da-shwey there and returned to his home. In the moonlight, Da-shwey walked along the dyke to a certain willow tree, where he whistled sharply. A small boat, rowed by an eighteen year old boy, flashed through the rustling reeds to the bank.

"Did you succeed, brother?" asked the boy with a grin.

"Yes, I succeeded!" replied Da-shwey as he jumped aboard.

The boy shot the boat away from the bank and sent it gliding quietly across the placid bosom of Bayang Lake. A watcher from the shore would have seen the lines of the craft and the men on it gradually merge into a black dot which dissolved into the night mist.

Chapter XIV

A Marriage Is Arranged — Autumn, 1943

When Da-shwey reached Big Poplar, the other cadres had also returned from their missions to the puppet controlled villages Nearly every one of the men was able to report having induced the puppet leaders to cooperate with the Ba Lu.

The next day, as Shen had promised, the captive mayors were permitted to return to their posts. In the evening a meeting was called to discuss how to carry out the Party directive to work with the Chinese officials who were pretending to cooperate with the Japanese, and to intensify the organizing of the masses. All of the cadres were assigned to new duties. Da-shwey was ordered to Shenjya to secretly reactivate the people's organizations there which had been scattered in the last Jap drive.

Within a week after Da-shwey commenced his underground activities, Goupi and his gang of spies stretched forth their bloody hands. To the people of Shenjya, the noseless Goupi was a wild dog who left his stench wherever he went. This time, acting on his orders, in the middle of the night the spies set fire to the home of Twur's mother. When the peasants finally dragged her body out, it was charred and shriveled beyond recognition.

Da-shwey immediately reported the crime to Blacky Tsay in Big Poplar. Blacky was enraged.

"Our policy is generous," he said tautly, "but to a swine like Goupi, we don't have to be polite!"

The guerrillas agreed that Goupi must be executed. Twur, beating his breast and stamping his feet in fury and grief, demanded that he be sent to take his own revenge. Blacky talked this proposal over with the others and it was decided to entrust the job to Twur and Da-shwey jointly. They were to find a means of capturing Goupi, then execute him as a warning to all unrepentant traitors.

They set out immediately and arrived in Shenjya the same night. Inquiry revealed that Goupi and Lyew were satisfying their cravings in a Korean heroin den. The two guerrillas strode swiftly to the illicit compound. They scaled the wall and burst into the north building where Goupi and Lyew were taking their ease on a *kang*. The Korean proprietor was in the process of preparing their pipes. A bodyguard was fast asleep in the corner. Twur leaped forward and dragged Goupi off the *kang*. Da-shwey covered the others with his pistol.

"I'll kill anyone who makes a sound!" he snapped, and relieved the puppets of their guns.

Twur bound them and the Korean and stuffed their mouths with cotton wadding. "I see you're still playing the traitor!" he growled at Lyew, as he tied him up.

With terrified rolling eyes, the noseless Goupi followed the guerrillas' every move. Twur and Da-shwey in a whispered consultation decided to bring Lyew along to witness the execution to impress the lesson on his mind.

"This doesn't concern you," said Da-shwey to the bodyguard and the Korean. "You just stay here quietly!"

Prodding their prisoners ahead of them with their pistols, the guerrillas left the compound and noiselessly moved to the outskirts of the village. The traitors were bound with their own sashes which were smooth and slippery. Da-shwey and Twur each held the free end of the sash of one prisoner.

Goupi knew that with his record he could expect no mercy. The moment he felt Twur's hand relax a trifle at the end of his tether, he yanked it out of his captor's grasp and ran down the road at top speed. Frantically, Twur gave chase.

"Why don't you shoot?" shouted Da-shwey.

Twur hastily fired, but his shot went wild. Lyew thought he saw his chance, pulled his sash from Da-shwey's hand and dashed to the right into the fields. Da-shwey took after him firing as he ran. Although he only intended to wound him, his first shot went clear through Lyew's skull. Blood was still spurting from the drilled forehead when Da-shwey reached the body.

Twur continued his chase but Goupi was soon lost in the dark. Punching his own head in bitter frustration, Twur slowly walked back to Da-shwey.

"I ought to die!" he said angrily. "I let him get away right before my eyes!" The big youth squatted on his heels and wept.

"We certainly made a mess of this!" said Da-shwey miserably. "Lyew ran, and in my haste, I killed him! What mother's — rotten luck! We kill a man we shouldn't have, and the one we're supposed to execute gives us the slip!"

Just then, the puppets in the tower fortress opened with a machine gun in the direction in which they had heard shooting. Bullets flew dangerously close to the two guerrillas. They hurried to get out of range.

When they returned to Big Poplar, both were severely criticized. Goupi didn't dare to remain in Shenjya. Shaken to the marrow, he fled to his father's stronghold in the walled town, where for several days he was unable to leave his bed.

A few weeks later, apprehensive of the growing power of the Ba Lu, the Japs withdrew from Shenjya to the town. They left the puppet troops behind to garrison the fortress. Gwo, its commander, was badly frightened by this turn of events. Pretending to be ill, he too fled to the town to "recuperate".

Blacky sent a note to the traitors in the fortress warning them to stop persecuting the peasants. The guerrillas plastered Shenjya with anti-Jap slogans and on the fortress itself pasted several posters welcoming the puppets to join the resistance movement.

One evening, Blacky and Da-shwey were having a talk with Shen in his home, when voices were heard in the courtyard. Looking through the window, they could see three soldiers armed with rifles approaching. Shen blanched and excitedly leaped to his feet.

"Quick!" he urged. "Hide in the next room!"

"It doesn't matter," said Blacky calmly. "I'll take care of them." He concealed a small pistol in his sleeve and placed his Mauser in plain sight on the *kang*, to make it appear that he had been taken unawares; then quietly said a few words to Da-shwey who did the same.

The puppets pushed aside the door curtain and entered. They stared at the two men sitting on the *kang*. A stocky black-bearded stranger of swarthy complexion, with flashing eyes, was examining them from head to foot. Beside him sat a powerful young peasant. Shen, the leader of the district puppet rural administration, was standing off to one side looking very uneasy. Noticing the Mausers on the *kang*, the puppets guessed that the strangers were Ba Lu. Aghast, they started to leave.

"Don't go!" ordered the big peasant. "Our Commander has something to say to you."

When the puppets heard the word "Commander", they were more alarmed than ever. Hastily, they drew to attention and bowed from the waist.

"We await the Commander's instructions!"

"What are you doing running around so late at night?" demanded Blacky with a frown.

His tone was quite sharp and the puppets' faces turned yellow. Their hands held stiffly respectful at their sides, they replied, "We've only come out for a walk and a smoke — nothing else!"

"Sit down!" commanded Blacky.

"When the Commander is seated, we must stand!"

"Never mind about that. We're all Chinese. Sit down and let's talk a while."

The puppets sat together on a hard bench and rested their rifles against their sides. The squad leader, a man with the grey face of an opium addict, offered a cigarette to Blacky who said he didn't smoke. When the offer was made to Da-shwey, he too refused.

"We Ba Lu can't afford to get used to smoking cigarettes. They're too expensive," Da-shwey said as he pulled out his pipe and pouch.

After meeting with two rebuffs, the squad leader managed to give a cigarette to Shen, but he himself didn't dare to smoke. Awkwardly, he replaced the pack in his pocket.

Blacky knit his bushy brows. "I have some orders for you men!" he said sternly.

The severity of his manner brought the puppets leaping to their feet. Trembling, they addressed him with humble servility.

"Give your orders, Commander, and we will obey!"

"First, except on business I don't want you wandering about the streets."

"Yes, Commander!"

"Second, you're to stop 'squeezing' the peasants."

"Yes, Commander!"

"Third, be careful of the way you carry your guns. They should be worn slung across your backs, muzzle down."

"Yes, Commander!"

"Furthermore, if there's anything you want in the future, go to the mayor. Stay away from the peasants. They're simple honest people and don't have to put up with your bluster. Right?"

"Yes, yes, yes, Commander!"

Da-shwey cleared his throat and leveled his gaze at the puppets. "I also have orders for you! You've got to stop demanding white flour. In times like these, where are the peasants going to get white flour to feed you? Do you agree?"

"Yes, yes! Absolutely right!" The puppets nodded vigorously.

"You don't have to be so formal," said Blacky in a more friendly tone. "We're all Chinese, all fellow countrymen. As you see we've put our weapons on the *kang* because we don't consider you enemies. But you must carry out what we've told you to do today. We'll come here often to check up, so don't forget!"

The puppets assured him they would remember and that the orders would be obeyed to the letter.

"Good!" said Blacky. "You can leave now. We'll be watching to see how you act in the future."

"Yes, Commander! You will see how we obey, since you know everything we do!" The puppets picked up their rifles, bowed, and turned to go.

Shen wasn't sure of how the puppets would report his part in this incident. He quickly stepped forward. "Forgive me if I don't see you out, Mr. Squad Leader. These two Ba Lu comrades came by to educate me today," he said defensively, "and at the same time have had a chance to teach you men also! Quite a coincidence, ha, ha, ha!"

"It has been very enlightening," replied the squad leader, "and greater pleasure than an opium session!"

The puppets respectfully withdrew. As soon as the guerrillas were sure the soldiers were out of earshot, they uncorked the laughter which had been bubbling within them and roared with merriment.

"It was wonderful!" chuckled Blacky. "Just like students and teachers!"

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After several more similar encounters between guerrillas and puppets, the conduct of the latter improved immeasurably. But the new garrison commander in Shenjya, whose nickname was Big Crow, was still behaving like a wild beast. He took things from shops without paying and constantly jabbered scornfully of the Ba Lu.

"The Japs have wiped them all out!" he jeered.

Some of the progressives in the secretly revived Peasants' Union and the Youth League held a conference with Da-shwey. A few nights later they caught Big Crow in a dark lane.

"Have you been eating panther liver that you're so tough?" they demanded. "You said there aren't any more Ba Lu. Well," pointing at Da-shwey, "here's one right before your eyes! Are you still going to harass the people?"

As Da-shwey listed every bad thing that the puppet had ever said or done, Big Crow cringed in fear. Clasping his hands in front of him, he bowed low repeatedly.

"My eyes are big, but they have no pupils!" moaned Big Crow abjectly. "I don't know how to act like a man! You know all about me; I'm like a turtle in a glass bowl! * From now on I'll behave!"

They lectured him for nearly an hour, then he was permitted to return to the fortress.

Thereafter, everyone of the puppets in Shenjya, from Big Crow down, took his orders from the Ba Lu. If the situation warranted it, Blacky would summon the garrison leader and give him special instructions.

Once Big Crow's bodyguard stole a woman's jacket. The victim reported the theft to the Women's Association, which promptly called together a few dozen members and climbed to the roof of a building opposite the fortress tower.

"Puppet countrymen!" they called. "Have you forgotten the rules which the Ba Lu gave you? How can you permit the people to be wronged?"

From the top of the tower, Big Crow answered them. "Tell me what's on your mind, ladies!"

"How come your bodyguard stole Mrs. Jow's jacket? It must be returned to her. Our Women's Association won't stand for that sort of thing!"

The next day, the purloined article was restored to its original owner.

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Now that Shenjya was under control, Blacky called Da-shwey and Mey for a meeting. He asked whether Da-shwey was willing to attempt to open up the village of Hojwang and whether Mey would take over Da-shwey's job in Shenjya. Both cadres gladly accepted the suggested assignments.

Looking at the two sitting next to each other on the *kang*, Blacky thought they made an excellent couple; the sight of them filled him with pleasure. It was obvious that they loved one another deeply, but he knew that unless he gave them a little push they might never speak up.

"You're fine comrades," he said with a grin. "One has never married and the other is long since divorced. I think you'd be very suitable to one another. Let me formally propose that you marry! First get to know each other thoroughly, then think it over. What do you say?"

"Ha!" replied Da-shwey, his heart thumping, "after working together with her for all these years, do you mean to say I still don't understand her?"

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* A pun uncomplimentary to himself. "Turtle" implies illegitimacy.

Mey blushed, and she thought to herself — There's nothing more for me to understand. I've known his every thought, his every emotion for a long time!

Da-shwey finally broke the strained silence which followed. "I certainly have no objection!" he blurted, with an awkward formality born of embarrassment. "I have a very good impression of Comrade Mey. She works hard and aggressively; she's considerate of all the cadres. She didn't let Jinlung's family prevent her from joining the resistance . . . " Da-shwey faltered. "Anyhow she's wonderful! I don't know how to put it. . . . "

"You've said too much already!" interposed Mey with a dazzling smile. "I have plenty of faults and you're better than I am in every respect!" Turning to Blacky, she matched Da-shwey's formality. "I completely approve of Comrade Da-shwey. I think he's splendid. He's solid as a rock. When the Japs tortured him so cruelly, he didn't give an inch! He does fine work and learns better than I. I have no objections either!"

Blacky could no longer restrain himself and he laughed loud and long.

"Good, good! The Party county committee has been hoping you two would feel this way! When the situation improves a little, you can be married! In the meantime, continue to work with hearts at ease. Don't worry!"

Their faces scarlet, but inwardly fairly bursting with joy, Mey and Da-shwey murmured their agreement.

The next day, Mey moved in with Uncle Li and began her underground activities of organizing the masses in Shenjya. She worked only after dark, usually in disguise. From time to time, in accordance with instructions from her superiors, she called on Shen, the leader of the district puppet rural administration, who was now secretly helping the Ba Lu. The information he supplied she turned over to a "messenger", who delivered it to guerrilla headquarters.

After several weeks on the job, one night during a visit to Shen, Mey became lax; she paid no attention to the sound of footsteps in the compound. It happened that Iino, now the Jap commander of the fortress in the neighboring village of Hsye Liu, had heard from his puppet assistant Gwo that Shen was the possessor of a fine ivory mahjong set. That night he had come to "request" it from Shen.

Iino left his bodyguard outside and walked into the room where Mey and Shen were talking underground business. The Jap's entrance was so sudden and unexpected that Mey jumped to her feet in alarm. With flushed face and pounding heart, she stared wildly at Shen.

Shen too was excited, but he gave no outward show of being flurried.

"Ah, your excellency!" he said smoothly. "Come in, come in! Please be seated!"

The Jap couldn't take his eyes off Mey. "Who . . . she?"

"That's my niece!" replied Shen quickly. "Please, do sit down!"

"I'll go help Aunty boil some water for tea," said Mey, and she went out of the room.

Iino sat with his eyes half-closed, looking dreamily absorbed at the door through which Mey had gone. He finally came out of his reverie, and laughed strangely.

"Your niece," said the Jap to Shen, "this!" He stuck up his thumb from a clenched fist, and giggled like a school boy. "Fine, fine!"

Mey's skin had become very white because she had to hide indoors during the day. When she reddened and her big eyes went wide at Iino's discovering her in Shen's house, she looked lovely. The Jap was smitten, completely overcome by her beauty.

Shen surreptitiously wiped the sweat from his brow. He animatedly began to talk of other things, hoping to divert Iino's mind into different channels. But the Jap was too far gone.

"Your niece what age?" he inquired.

This is bad! thought Shen. I'd better make her sound too old!

"She's twenty-five! Will your excellency visit our fortress?"

Laughing inanely, Iino wrinkled his whiskey-red nose.

"Me — " he held up ten fingers and waved his hands three times.

"Ah, ah . . . your excellency is thirty," Shen nodded.

Lost in thought, the Jap sat a while in an abstracted daze. Then, forgetting to say a word about the mahjong set, he left as suddenly as he came.

The following day, Iino's Chinese interpreter called on Shen. He brought a wrist watch, a ring, and two bolts of satin, and said that the Jap wanted to marry Shen's niece. Trying to stall, Shen claimed that she was already engaged. Iino, replied the interpreter, had ordered that the girl be given to him in marriage no matter what the circumstances. The day after tomorrow, she must be sent to Hsye Liu; otherwise, Shen and his whole family would be arrested!

The interpreter left the gifts and departed.

Shen rubbed hands in desperation and paced the floor. But even his shrewd brain could think of no way out. When Mey heard what had happened, she became frantic, and wanted to return to guerrilla headquarters immediately. Shen was afraid to let her leave.

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Mey angrily. "Are you really thinking of turning me over to the Japs? The Ba Lu would never forgive you for that!"

Shen stamped his feet in anguish. "What am I going to do? Iino is insisting, and you know what kind of a man he is! If he gets angry at me, he only has to say one word and they'll cut my head off! This is no joking matter!"

"Now take it easy," said Mey, trying to soothe him. "I'll go back to headquarters and we'll think of a plan. In any event, we'll see to it that you don't come to any harm. Won't that be all right?" She had to talk to him for nearly an hour until he consented, reluctantly, that she return to her organization.

When Mey reached Big Poplar, the guerrillas were discussing how to take the village of Hsye Liu, for which place Blacky was responsible. He had already revived the people's organizations in the village, and by legal means, helped an underground worker be elected to the office of mayor. In the fortress, the puppet troops were willing to be cooperative, but a few dozen Jap soldiers watched them carefully. The heaviest armaments — two machine guns — were kept in Jap hands. The guerrillas had been unable to take the stronghold.

The commander of the fortress was Iino, Mey's admirer. As crafty as he was vicious, he liked to say, "Great Japan with China one family. Imperial Army has come to save poor people!" But in the flash of an eye, he would give rein to his sadistic cruelty. He killed countless Chinese, and enjoyed dealing the death blow personally. He would order a soldier to pour a basin of cold

water on the neck of a kneeling prisoner; then with one sweep of his samurai sword, he would sever the victim's head from his body.

"Japan so sorry for Chinese people," he would snigger, "otherwise long ago kill all dead!"

Mey told her comrades of her encounter with Iino and of his marriage demand. A roar of anger greeted her recital, but Blacky urged the guerrillas to be calm and to concentrate on evolving a method to cope with the situation. After considerable debate, a plan of action was agreed upon.

They sent for Shen, and he came immediately; but when his role in the strategy was outlined, he was so evasive and so obviously terrified, that the guerrillas decided to exclude him completely. They detained him temporarily in Big Poplar. Another man was sent to Iino in Hsye Liu with a letter saying that the family of Shen's niece had given its consent to the marriage, and that the bride would appear on the appointed date. While the cadres busied themselves with preparations, Blacky Tsay went on ahead to Hsye Liu to make certain arrangements there.

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The day of the wedding, eighteen-year-old Ru dressed up as the bride. He wore a wig, a flowered satin jacket, pink trousers, and high heeled shoes. With a little lipstick, powder and rouge, he looked quite attractive. His head was covered with a red veil, and he tucked a small pistol under his waist band.

The teacher, Miss Chen, who volunteered to serve as his bridesmaid, was also dressed very elegantly. Mr. Mi, now the mayor of Big Poplar, pretended to be the bride's cousin. He wore a brand-new robe and jacket, topped off by a shiny satin scull cap. Four gentlemen from the Ba Lu county militia went along as other relatives. Every one of the six had concealed weapons on their persons.

Other comrades had already left to perform their assigned duties. In the afternoon, the bridal party setting out by boat, crossed the lake. Waiting to welcome them on the dyke at Hsye Liu was Wang the new mayor, four musicians, several Japs and a squad of puppet soldiers. A brightly decorated bridal sedan chair and two smaller sedan chairs had also been prepared.

As the craft pulled in to shore, puppets from the fortress came running out to get a good look at the well dressed visitors. Nearby, cormorant fishermen, in small boats, stared curiously. With a "Woo! Ahr!" they released their birds, which swished into the air, zigzagged erratically, then dived deep into the water at the silver fish. The birds are trained to bring the fish they catch to the boats of their masters.

The new mayor and his colleague from Big Poplar exchanged greetings as the newcomers ascended the dyke. After helping the "bride" into the big sedan chair, Miss Chen and Mr. Mi mounted the smaller conveyances. The musicians struck up a lively tune, and escorted by the soldiers, the wedding party entered the village.

A large Jap flag fluttered from a pole on top of the fortress. In a compound nearby Iino had established an official temporary residence in front of which sentries were posted. Candy and cigarette peddlars as well as crowds of curious spectators thronged the approaches to the house.

When the sedan chairs stopped at the gate, Iino and two other Japs emerged to welcome the arrivals. The short fat groom was wearing a black western style suit and a white shirt with a stiff collar. His bulbous whiskey nose was redder than ever. Showing all his teeth in a big grin, he led the guests into the reception room.

Many Japs crowded around demanding to see the bride. With a pleasant smile, Mr. Mi intervened. "Gentlemen, according to Chinese customs, you cannot lift the veil!"

Wang, the mayor of Hsye Liu, introduced him as the bride's cousin, while Miss Chen hastily convoyed the "girl" toward the bridal chamber. Ru couldn't see very well because of the heavy veil which covered his head, and he wasn't used to the high heeled shoes. Tripping over the threshold, he nearly fell, but Miss Chen caught him in time. The teacher was drenched in nervous perspiration as she supported him into the bedroom.

It was furnished according to Iino's ideas of luxury — an iron bedstead draped with pink mosquito netting, a big mirror, a sofa . . . A gang of Japs trouped in. Laughing, they surveyed the "bride" who sat primly on the edge of the bed.

"You must leave at once," ordered Miss Chen. "She's very shy!"

"Everybody out, everybody out!" laughed Mr. Mi as he pushed the Japs through the door.

It was already dark, and the dining room was illuminated with the brilliant white light of a pressure lamp. Gathered around the tables, the Chinese and Jap guests tried to outdo one another in politeness, each refusing the places of honor. When everyone was finally seated, the food was served. Soon the tables were groaning with vast quantities of chicken, duck, fish, whiskey and beer.

"You're marrying a Chinese girl and you should follow Chinese customs!" said Mr. Mi to Iino. "We all must drink lots of wine!"

Iino kept grinning so happily that his nose and eyes seemed screwed together in one piece. He drank toast after toast, and Wang, the mayor of Hsye Liu, saw to it that his glass was never empty. All the Japs noisily consumed vast quantities of beer and whiskey as the waiters ran from table to table opening bottles. Puppet junior officers in a side room, loudly engaged in drinking games, added their shouts and laughter to the general clamor.

The more the Japs drank, the sillier they became. Soon they were guzzling directly from the bottles and performing ridiculous antics. One of them, his face flaming, staggered to his feet and dragged off his tunic to reveal a striped white shirt. He started to dance clumsily in the middle of the room, a little rag doll affixed to his belt bounding in time to his jerky movements. Singing a raucous accompaniment, he rolled his piggy eyes above his spectacles, which had slid down to the tip of his nose. The Japs beat out a rhythm on the whiskey glasses with their chopsticks and raised their voices to join him in song.

Before long, they were pounding their hands on the tables, wagging their heads and laughing uproariously. Bowls and dishes bounding off the festive board, smashed to the floor. The guerrillas could barely conceal the hatred burning in their eyes as they watched the depraved excesses of the Japs.

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Mayor Wang's wife, who was helping in the kitchen, sent in some food to Ru and Miss Chen. They gulped it down hastily. Miss Chen lit the oil lamp; but she turned the wick small.

"He'll be here soon," she whispered to Ru. "Don't give yourself away!"

"Don't you people do anything before I've finished my job," he cautioned in a low voice. "If something goes wrong, don't run away and leave me!"

"How could we do a thing like that?" laughed Miss Chen. "You just do your part well; the boys in the next room will take care of the rest."

A few minutes later, two Japs entered, half carrying the reeling Iino and deposited him on the sofa next to the bed. They smirked meaningfully at the "bride" and departed. Miss Chen followed them, closing the door behind her. Ru sat sideways on the edge of the bed, with his head lowered coyly. The noise of a phonograph could be heard wailing thinly through the wall.

Iino lay back on the sofa in a drunken semi-stupor, laughing foolishly as he squinted with lecherous eyes at the slim figure of his "bride". He smoked half a cigarette, flicked away the butt, patted the place beside him on the sofa.

"Come, come! Sit here!"

Ru's heart was thumping against his ribs, but he made no reply. Iino attributed this to virgin shyness. Wrinkling his purple nose, he showed all his yellow teeth in a bray of laughter. Ru crawled further back on the bed, surreptitiously slipping the small pistol from his bosom into his hand. Driveling with desire, Iino leaned forward and grabbed him by the leg. Ru fired at the Jap, but the vigor of the amorous struggle made him miss. Iino's mouth dropped open stupidly, and as he stared, Ru put two bullets through his brain.

At the sound of the shots, the Chinese "wedding guests" suddenly produced guns, kicked over the tables, and began pouring lead into every enemy who was armed. The Jap didn't even have time to reach for their pistols; they fell dead in scores. Puppets crawled in panic across the floor, but the guerrillas who had men at every door, even as they were killing Japs shouted to the Chinese traitors, "Surrender and live!" The advice was quickly taken.

In the compound, dozens of disguised district and county militia dropped over the wall and joined the fray. When the two Japs standing guard at the gate started for the house with their rifles, they were shot by a couple of "candy peddlars" — actually village cadremen.

The night was pitch black, for the moon still hadn't risen, and there was feverish activity under the cover of darkness in several other parts of the village. At the lake, the "cormorant fishermen" drew pistols and climbed up the dyke; in the temple, a gang of "workmen" became similarly armed — everyone was a member of the district militia or the local village guerrillas. The arrangements which Blacky Tsay had made with some of the puppets in the fortress worked smoothly; when pressure was put on it from inside and out, it surrendered without a shot.

In the house, the firing had stopped. The puppet junior officers, at one time or another, all had been "instructed" by Blacky Tsay. They docilely turned over their arms the moment the Ba Lu went into action. Dead and wounded Japs sprawled about the floor. A few were on their knees pleading for their lives; some had to be pulled out from beneath furniture; others had jumped through the glass of the unopened windows, but were captured in the courtyard.

The rooms were a complete shambles — playing cards all over the floor, smashed crockery, chairs and tables overturned and leaning at crazy angles. . . . Ru joined the guerrillas who were making a thorough search for weapons. He had lost his wig somewhere and his shaven head looked rather startling in contrast to the feminine finery of his clothes. One high heeled shoe was gone too; a long pink silk stocking trailed from the shoeless foot. Now that the farce was over, Ru was feeling very uncomfortable in his disguise. When he spied a good cloth overcoat hanging on a coat rack in a corner, he decided to change into it. But as he reached for it, the thing distinctly moved. Ru nearly jumped out of his skin. Cautiously, he poked the coat open with the point of his gun. There, wrapped high around the pole of the clothe rack like a monkey on a stick, was a Jap soldier, shivering violently.

"Come down off there!" shouted Ru.

Scared to death, the Jap brought himself and the rack crashing to the floor together. It was the disgusting dancer of the earlier evening.

The streets were a hubbub of sound. Carrying torches, baskets, picks and shovels, men and women, young and old — all were heading for the fortress. By morning, they had taken home every piece of brick, tile and wood for their own use. Where the fortress had stood, now there was just level ground.

*

The victory in Hsye Liu considerably shook the confidence of the puppet troops in neighboring villages.

"We should strike while the iron is hot," the cadres said to the peasants. "Let's clean out the remaining fortresses in one mother's — sweep!"

A few days later, in Shenjya, Mey mobilized the forces of the Workers' and Peasants' Unions, the Children's League, the Youth League and the Women's Association. In high spirits, they collected anything and everything which could be classed or used as a weapon. Da-shwey assembled part of the district militia and all of the newly organized Shenjya village militia. As soon as it was dark, these combined bodies of several hundred people surrounded the fortress in tight rings of humanity.

The commander Big Crow and his puppet troops couldn't imagine what was going on. They were terribly frightened. Not daring to show his face, Big Crow hid behind the crenelated battlements on the roof of the tower.

"Peasant friends! Ba Lu comrades!" he shouted. "We're all one family! If there's anything on your mind, speak out!"

"You fellows have been living in there too long!" roared the masses. "Come on out! We want to destroy the fortress!"

"Big Crow! We've decided to keep our wheat flour to eat ourselves! You men go home and be peasants again!"

"The tiles and wood in the fortress are ours — we're waiting to take them back!"

Mey led her groups in the song she had taught them:

The birds fly toward brightness,
Men must take the road to life!
Don't be a foreigner's slave,

Don't be a Jap's dog!
Change your heart and mind; be a new man.
Turn over your gun and be our friend!

"Big Crow!" called Da-shwey when the musical exhortation ended, "you heard how the Jap garrison in Hsye Liu was wiped out, didn't you? We don't want to kill our own countrymen, so come down. Give us your guns and return the materials to the people! We're all Chinese — come back to the Chinese side!".

"Wait a minute," replied the commander. "I'll speak to the men!"

But the puppets didn't want to wait to be asked. Their voices were clearly audible in the street below.

"What's there to talk about? If we're going down, let's go down! I've been sick of this for a long time!"

"Rotting here in this tower is no way to live! Do you want me to do this forever?"

"We've gotten everything ready, just waiting for this day!"

Instantly, neatly bound bundles of rifles, cartridge belts and hand grenades were lowered by many ropes from the battlements to the ground. A few peasants began to applaud, and more and more joined until the whole village rang with the sound of nearly a thousand calloused hands clapping in joyous enthusiasm.

"Welcome home, countrymen! . . . We're glad you've straightened out, Big Crow! . . . Today, we're *inviting* you to eat white flour!"

Within the next couple of weeks, the puppets in the fortresses in Hwang Hwa, Hojwang, Dungyu and a great many other villages were similarly "called out".

Chapter XV

Leadership — Winter, 1943

In the months that followed, the regular Communist army, which had escaped the Jap encirclement in 1942, won several big victories on the outer perimeter of enemy-controlled territory. Behind the lines, local Party units organized the masses and waged innumerable successful struggles. The strength of the enemy was beginning to crack everywhere and conditions were restored to what they had been before the Jap "mopping-up" campaign. Resistance forces were formidable in the countryside, the people's control of governmental authority in the villages grew stronger day by day and there had been a great increase in military equipment.

However, when Jap power was at its height, the landlords had fished in troubled waters. They repossessed the land which the peasants had retrieved,

seized additional property, forced payments of back rent and confiscated food. A man must eat, and no one could fight the Japs on an empty stomach. After democratic government was restored, the people demanded a rent reduction program. Cadres from the district and county administrations were sent to the rural areas to lead the movement. It was during the course of this program that Da-shwey and Mey had a falling out.

Blacky had been intending to help them arrange the marriage which they both said they wanted, but he was extremely busy and just couldn't find the time. Since they worked in different villages, the lovers seldom saw each other.

One day, Mey, whose job was in Shenjya, went with a number of peasant representatives to call on Shen, who owned and leased out considerable land. He received them with the utmost courtesy, and after much polite nodding and bowing them to seats, asked what he could do for them. They said they had come to talk about rent reduction.

Shen laughed affably. "It's a good thing, and I'm completely in favor of it. In fact, I welcome it. I'm sure we can come to an understanding — absolutely sure."

The delegates were impressed with Shen's cooperative attitude, and they relaxed a bit. It looked as though it wouldn't be too difficult.

"Since you agree, Mr. Shen, that's fine," they said. "Let's see what we can work out."

Although the landlord spoke like an ardent progressive, actually he was playing for time. A few days ago he had heard which way the wind was blowing and he had made his preparations.

Servants entered and set up a banquet table. Shen rose, smiling beatifically. He indicated the table with a sweeping gesture of his hand.

"If you please, gentlemen! You favor me with a visit so seldom! Let this be my small token of appreciation!"

Under the circumstances, Mey didn't think it appropriate to eat the landlord's food. "It's getting late," she said. "When we finish here, we still have other business to attend to."

"Comrade Mey," replied Shen gaily bantering, "Don't you have to eat as well as work? If you're not hungry, these gentlemen are; if they're not hungry, then I am! Why can't we eat and talk at the same time?" Mey still looked hesitant. In an aggrieved tone he continued to press her. "If you folks refuse to eat my food that means you dislike me. When the Japs were in Shenjya, you used to have dinner here often; you didn't treat me like an outsider then! Today you want to eat elsewhere — where can I hang my old head in shame?"

Shen didn't wait for Mey to answer, but pushed her gently into a seat at the head of the table. A little embarrassed at the eloquence of his outburst, Mey protested no further.

"Must I invite you individually, gentlemen?" Shen asked the representatives. "We know one another so well — some of you are my older generation, some my younger generation — but we're all like one family! Please be seated!"

Since Mey seemed to have already consented, the delegates couldn't very well refuse. They took their places around the table.

That day, Shen was wearing the garb of the average peasant — a rimless felt skull-cap and quilted cotton jacket and trousers. His appearance and his pleasant manner did not in the least resemble that of a landlord. He drank toasts with every one of the guests and chatted continuously. During the course of the meal he managed to compliment Mey and the delegates, and reveal the extent of his efforts against the Japanese. The guests soon felt that Shen really was one of their own; they dropped their cautious reserve.

Every inch the considerate host, while urging this guest and that to eat more or drink more, Shen gradually brought the conversation back to the subject of rent reduction. He complained sadly of his own sorry plight.

"You all know my circumstances. Although nominally a landlord, I'm having a very difficult time. Of course, I'm still a little better off than the rest of you. You reduce rents any way you see fit; I'll have no objection!"

Mey recited to him the terms of the rent reduction law and asked that Shen observe it. He agreed without reservation and said that he would issue new leases tomorrow.

The delegates thought Shen was a very enlightened landlord. They were so delighted with his friendly compliance that they said nothing about his coughing up the "back rent" which he had collected during the Jap occupation of the village. After all, they had shaken his hand and eaten his food. How could they be harsh with him?

When the Japs captured villages in the liberated areas where rent reduction had been instituted, the landlords forced the peasants to pay according to the old leases. This meant the tenants had to pay the difference between the reduced rent paid during the first liberated period and the amount provided in the old lease, plus the "full" amounts of any rents which the landlord had not collected. Rents were paid in kind, the landlords taking as much as 70% of the crop. The accumulated amounts which the peasants were compelled to pay were enormous. This practice continued until the villages were re-liberated. Then, a rent reduction law was instituted requiring the peasant tenant to pay only a reasonable proportion of his crop as rent. Landlords were compelled to return the "back rents" they had extorted during the Japanese occupation.

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The next day a meeting of the Peasants' Union was held to supervise the issuance of new leases to peasants by landlords. 7 acres of Shen's land in 1938 had been placed under the administration of the neighboring Swunjya because the tillable ground in that village was too small for its population. Shen retained ownership of the land. The authorities rented it on his behalf to various peasants in Shwunjya at the then standard reduced rentals. The rents were transmitted to him as they were collected. He also owned 28 acres in Shenjya, but he had only prepared leases covering 20 of them.

"We have less land here than I thought," said Wey, one of the peasant representatives.

"Swunjya still has 7 acres of mine. You men are looking after the interests of the people of this village — why don't you get them back?" suggested Shen, trying to distract attention from the amount of the holdings he registered.

"We're short of land here, but they've got more than they can use!"

Wey was a person of mercurial temperament. It only took a little stimulus like this to start him violently advocating to his fellow representatives that the 7 acres be returned to the administration of the Shenjya authorities. The other men readily agreed to his proposal; they put the matter up to Mey.

"What if they don't have enough land in Swunjya?" she asked.

"Huh!" retorted Wey. "They've got more than they can use!"

"Even if they're not short, they'll say they are!" another delegate chimed in. "Who wouldn't want to have extra land if they could get it?"

"If they don't have enough, that's their worry!" added a third. "It's none of our business!"

"We're short ourselves; why should we let them till our land?" an eighty-year-old representative known as "Grandpa" piped up.

"When people are hungry, they don't give away white flour rolls for others to eat!" put in a youngster.

The wrangling went on until Mey's ears hurt. Although she wasn't clear about the situation, she felt the idea sounded quite reasonable. We ought to be able to manage this easily, for Da-shwey is in Swunjya, she thought. As soon as the image of him came to her mind, her whole body glowed with warmth.

Mey told the delegates that she would inquire further into the facts and report to them in a day or so. After everybody had gone, she tore a blank page out of her notebook, took up her flowery-handled writing brush and painstakingly composed a letter:

Comrade Da-shwey,

Are you busy lately? Are you well? Is your work going satisfactorily? I am sure your work is definitely successful! You must teach me and help me by telling me more about your training and experiences! The reason I write you this letter today is because I have a problem to discuss with you. It is that we do not have enough land in this village and the peasant representatives want to get back the 7 acres which was transferred formerly. We really are short of land! Please think the matter over and consider carefully. I hope you will send me a letter agreeing! My work is satisfactory and I am very well, so do not worry. Nothing more to say. See you soon.

I salute you and wish you complete performance of your duties.

Mey signed her full name, re-read the letter to herself, then affixed a formal oval-shaped seal beneath her signature. She addressed an envelope, enclosed her missive and gave it to a peasant to deliver to Swunjya.

When he received the letter, even before he opened it Da-shwey recognized Mey's handwriting, and his heart went soft within him. He read it twice, then took up his black-handled writing brush and wrote a reply:

Comrade Mey,

I have received your letter and noted that your work is satisfactory and that you are in good health. The news makes me very happy. As to your wanting me to teach and help you — ai! I certainly owe you an apology. Every day I plan to come to your village to see you, but I am always too busy to get away. I probably stick too close to the daily routine and I am quite ashamed of myself. In the future we must meet more often and help one another in study, in work, in culture and in understanding of politics. That is my earnest wish! I don't know anything about the question you have raised. It would be best if all of you came here to discuss the matter with us face to face. Come quickly! Definitely come! I still have much more to talk to you about!

With compliments and best wishes for your health and your work.

Da-shwey signed his full name and carefully affixed a square-shaped formal seal beneath his signature. He handed the reply to the messenger who had brought Mey's letter.

The morning after Da-shwey's answer arrived, a very happy girl set forth for Swunjya with the peasant representatives. Grandpa, who was still hearty, couldn't take his mind off those 7 acres. Leaning on his big walking staff, he went along too.

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The callers arrived while Da-shwey and the Swunjya delegates were in the midst of a discussion about their own land problems. The cadres and peasant representatives of the two villages greeted one another cordially. After a period of general friendly chatter, the Shenjya people raised the question of the 7 acres. Upon hearing the demand, their hosts stared straight ahead for a moment, then called Da-shwey into the next room for a whispered consultation. A few minutes later, the Swunjya delegates emerged, looking somewhat embarrassed. They let Da-shwey do the talking.

"Aiya!" Comrade Mey!" he said with a laugh. "I'm afraid there isn't much we can do about your problem! Don't you have plenty of land in Shenjya? Why do you want to take back the 7 acres?"

Mey stiffened, then she also laughed, a bit forcedly. "How can you talk like that? You know we don't have enough tillable ground!"

"Why isn't it enough?"

"If it was enough, do you think we'd be here asking you for more?"

As Mey and Da-shwey talked, the smiles gradually faded from their faces. Listening, the representatives of both villages became more and more irritated, until, patience exhausted, they joined in the quarrel.

"Anyhow, the land belongs to Shenjya and it ought to be returned to us!"

"It's been entrusted to Swunjya. We have a preference right!"

"We tilled the land before the war started, so our preference right is ahead of yours!"

"There weren't any 'preferences' until the 1938 rent reduction law and that's when the land was given to us!"

"We represent the interests of the peasants of Shenjya. If you take that attitude what can we report to them?"

"What about our duty to the people of Swunjya?"

And as the delegates wrangled, Da-shwey and Mey continued to shout at one another.

"There's nothing to argue about!" bawled Da-shwey. "The facts are clear!"

"I don't want to talk to you," yelled Mey angrily. "You only care about your own village and disregard ours."

"Some leader! You're just the tail of the masses!"

"Huh! And you're the tip of the tail of the masses!"

Cadre against cadre, delegate against delegate, red in the face, cords standing out in their necks, the peasants kept up their ear-splitting clamor. Before long one man was hoarse, another was panting, Da-shwey felt dizzy, Mey's stomach hurt and Grandpa sat weakly in a corner with his eyes bulging as he fought for breath.

At the height of the confusion, Blacky Tsay arrived from the county government on one of his periodic inspections.

"Good!" said the contestants. "Now that Blacky is here, we can ask him to settle this!"

Da-shwey told his side of the story; Mey gave her version; the Shenjya representatives explained their position; the Swunjya delegates stated the merits of their case — to hear them talk you would think they all were right! But when everyone had finished hotly defending his views, Blacky startled the whole assembly by his hearty, amused laughter.

He told them all to sit down and relax a few minutes. Then he began questioning.

"Did you get Shen to return the 'back rents' which he collected?"

"That . . . ah . . . not yet!" stammered Mey's group.

"We haven't had time," mumbled the Swunjya representatives. "We've been too busy with chicken feather and onion skin affairs, with light trivial matters!"

"Have you checked to see whether Shen has concealed any land holdings?"

The peasants looked at one another. "Aiya . . . who knows?"

Blacky grinned. "You're fighting over land, but you don't even know how much there is. What are you fighting about?" He couldn't help chuckling at their sheepish expressions and he continued with his questions. "Are you peasants settling accounts with landlords, or are you peasants struggling against peasants?"

The delegates were highly embarrassed. "Of course that's the whole point," muttered one of them, "and we missed it completely!"

Grandpa thumped the floor with his staff. "Hey! Shen still has plenty of land! If we just look, we'll find it!"

"He's been leasing it out in bits and pieces at different times so as to make it hard for us to trace!" cried a representative.

"Huh!" exclaimed another, pounding his fist into his hand. "The meat is in front of our mouths and we've been chewing on our tongues!"

Delegate Wey leaped to his feet. "We've been fooled! Mother's — ! It's all my fault! I listened to Shen and started this business about the 7 acres. He played with me like a pet monkey!"

"No, I'm the one to blame," said Mey blushing. "That day at his house, I should never have consented that we eat with him! He bewitched us all with his slick talks!"

The peasants sat and calculated — Shen had at least 35 acres; he definitely was concealing several acres and planning to rent them out secretly. If he were compelled to lease the extra land at the legal rate to the peasants in Shenjya who needed it most, there would be no shortage. If he were forced to return the grain collected as 'back rent', no one would go hungry!

Now that they were thinking clearly again, smiles reappeared on everyone's face. The delegates of the two villages apologized to each other for their rudeness; Mey and Da-shwey both ruefully acknowledged that they had forgotten their class standing. Blacky watched them from the sidelines and beamed.

"Enough, enough!" shouted delegate Wey. "We're all one family — why so much ceremony? Let's go and see Shen!"

The other peasants took up the cry. "Go, go! All peasants under the sun are one family! Let's go together!"

"Fine! You two go along too. The more people, the greater their strength," Blacky said to Mey and Da-shwey, but he cautioned all present. "At the same time you mustn't forget — while in one respect we're struggling against the landlords, in another respect we want their cooperation. Without that struggle, without improving the people's livelihood, we definitely won't be able to defeat the Japs. Without cooperation, without a united front, we won't be able to muster the additional strength needed. Chairman Mao has said we must struggle so that we can have unity; we must unite to resist the Japanese. We don't want to be rightists, but we also don't want to be too left. Everyone should keep those principles in mind!"

"Right, right!" replied the peasants. "We'll treat Shen reasonably." They cheerfully trooped out with Da-shwey and Mey, while Grandpa, leaning on his staff, hastily hobbled behind.

*

During the trip back to Shenjya, the atmosphere was friendly and gay. Da-shwey and Mey walked together.

"Blacky came just in time!" said Da-shwey. "If he hadn't shown up for inspection, who knows where our quarrel would have ended?"

Mey laughed. "You certainly were terrible — pointing your finger right at my nose and calling me names! And I was just as bad — whatever you called me I came back at you with more!"

"I was wearing a mirror on my backside — it reflected others but I couldn't see myself! I was really mad at you!"

"And I was furious! I thought to myself — how can he be so unreasonable? He's got a temper like a bull! Hereafter, I'm through with him!"

"You didn't mean it, did you?"

"How can you ask that?" replied Mey, her face scarlet.

Everyone knew that they would be married soon, and they were afraid of being teased for strolling shoulder to shoulder. Embarrassed, they separated and mingled with the peasant representatives.

"That Blacky is all right!" Grandpa was saying. "We were so mixed up, but with two or three words he solved everything!"

"If it weren't for the leadership of the Communist Party and Chairman Mao's direction," shouted delegate Wey enthusiastically, "we'd still be stuck dead in the same place!"

Someone started to sing the song of Chairman Mao, and bass, baritone and soprano voices joined in its cheerful melody to the rhythm of their marching feet:

The eastern sky reddens
As the sun climbs heavenward,
And there rises in China
Mao Tse-tung! . . .

Chapter XVI

Love and Hate — Spring and Summer, 1944

The rent reduction program was a complete success, and before you knew it, it was springtime. Since both Da-shwey and Mey were Communists, Blacky raised the question of their proposed marriage before the county Party Committee. Not only was it unanimously approved, but the comrades said they should have gotten married long ago.

By now Da-shwey was Party secretary in his home district; Mey was working in the county Women's Association. They fixed the eighth of March, Women's Day, as their wedding day, and the district and county Party organizations gave some money to help them in their preparations.

At last the happy day dawned. Only members of the various government units were invited, for it was feared that the peasants, if they knew, would spend money to buy presents. The ceremony was to take place in Da-shwey's combined home and district office. Everybody worked feverishly all morning getting ready. When Mey and her comrades arrived from the county, Twur and the militiamen were still sweeping and scrubbing. An apron tied round his waist, the district leader Jyow was personally doing the cooking.

"Is the 'new room' ready?" asked Tien excitedly.

"It's over here!" called Nyur from the west wing.

The newcomers hurried in and found three girls from the district Women's Association cheerfully busy decorating the bridal chamber. Fresh paper had been placed on the windows and red cut-out designs were pasted on the paper. The *kang* was covered with white sheets and a scarlet quilt — gifts from the Party district and county committees. Nyur was standing on a table hanging a painting on the wall opposite the *kang*. It was a water color of two red lotus flowers on one stalk in the midst of big green leaves.

Nyur hopped off the table when Mey entered and seized her hand. "Well, bride," she laughed, "do you have any criticism of the way we've fixed your 'new room'?"

Mey's blush matched the hue of the flowers. "You'll be marrying soon yourself and you're still so mischievous!" she said severely.

Tien laid the pillows she had embroidered on the *kang*. Other cadres added their gifts of handkerchiefs, soap, toothbrushes, tooth paste, notebooks . . . Dean Cheng was unable to come, but he sent a pair of congratulatory scrolls which were hung on both sides of the painting. The black ink characters stood out brightly against a red paper background and the sentiment was as modern as the literary style:

A new people overthrow the old system.
Old mates become a new couple.

There were several other scrolls, all of which combined the themes of marriage and the revolution. Some were serious, some were amusing, but all were vociferously received and hung in appropriate places on the walls.

*

The party became increasingly gayer and broad peasant jokes were the order of the day. Blacky was the first to notice that the traditional butt of wedding humor was missing.

"Eh! Where's our Da-shwey?"

"I'll go to look for him!" said Nyur and she started searching the rooms.

Da-shwey was hiding in the east wing, his head swimming. When he heard that Mey had arrived, his heart beat wildly and his face burned. He knew he would be laughed at if seen in this condition, so he rested on the *kang* and in a desperate show of nonchalance tried to read a newspaper. But he couldn't recognize a single word! Nyur soon discovered him and she laughed and clapped her hands.

"Come and look everybody!" she called. "The groom is in here studying!"

Snatching the newspaper away, she dragged him off the *kang*. The cadres roared with merriment and surrounded the scarlet Da-shwey. His face was nearly split with a broad embarrassed grin.

In the hall, three square tables were pushed together and long benches were placed on each side. Steaming platters of food were brought in and everyone sat down to eat. District and county cadres, regardless of rank, served as waiters. There were meat and fish and fresh vegetables and rice! It was a delicious meal; the guests ate heartily. As the host, Da-shwey was sparing with his own helpings, but the cadres wouldn't permit any courtesies.

"If you don't eat your fill, we won't let you get married!" they warned.

Although the peasants had not been notified, the news had nevertheless reached them by nightfall; they came from all the neighboring villages to pay their respects to the bridal couple. The house was much too small for the hundreds of visitors; guests overflowed into the outer compound. In the reception room, Ru and his young friends hung red silk lanterns. In their rosy glow, friends and well-wishers smilingly chatted with Mey and Da-shwey, seated beneath the portraits of Chairman Mao and General Chu Teh. Rollicking tunes from a phonograph were often drowned out by the shouts of laughter of the joyous celebrants.

Nyur presented the bride and groom with two big paper chrysanthemums which she had made herself and pinned them on their coats. Hauling the couple to the center of the room, she sat them down together on a bench. Jumpy Ma dumped basketfuls of peanuts on the tables while tea from a huge kettle was poured for all the guests.

The marriage ceremony was about to begin.

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First, at the direction of the master of ceremonies, everyone rose and bowed to the pictures of Chairman Mao and General Chu Teh. Then Mey and Da-shwey stepped forward and bowed again to the portraits of the leaders of the people, after which they bowed to the assembled guests.

"Bride and groom," called the master of ceremonies, "bow to each other!"

Straight as a ramrod, Da-shwey faced his bride and prepared to comply, but when Mey saw his solemn appearance and formal demeanor, she couldn't restrain herself. She burst into giggles, and ran.

"Nothing doing!" laughed the guests. "You have to give him a deep bow!"

The women pulled Mey back to her place where she hastily performed her bow. Da-shwey awkwardly retaliated.

Everyone took his seat and the witnesses were called upon to make short speeches. Blacky was both a witness and the "introducer". Grinning, he stood up and swept the guests with his flashing eyes.

"Comrades, the marriage today between comrades Da-shwey and Mey is most deserving of our congratulations. They have participated in the revolution together, and in its cruel struggles have been forged into excellent revolutionary warriors. I can't tell you how happy I am for them! In the old society they would not have been able to marry freely and they would have been miserable. Today, under the anti-Japanese democratic government, these two old friends in battle are becoming a new man and wife. Their life, unquestionably, will be a full and happy one! But the enemy has not yet been defeated. There are difficult struggles ahead. I hope that, led by the Communist Party, together, they will work still harder, help one another, criticise one another, and continuously progress. In conclusion —," Blacky looked directly at the couple and humorously squinted his eyes, "I hope next year there will be a fat little baby to join the ranks of the younger generation of the revolution!"

He sat down amid roars of laughter and applause.

Old Uncle Li, the "fort" keeper in Shenjya, was the next speaker. He smilingly placed on the table two packages neatly wrapped in red paper. He removed his felt scull cap to reveal a shining bald pate, and made a quaint old-fashioned bow to the bride and groom.

"The marriage of Da-shwey and Mey has gladdened the heart of every peasant!" Uncle Li said loudly. "We all wanted to chip in and buy something really nice, but the authorities wouldn't hear of it. So we've sent these two small gifts simply as a token of how we feel."

Uncle Li picked up a slip of red paper and in a clear voice read the characters written on it: "Defeat the Japs at an early date, so we can enjoy peace soon —

That's the first package — dates! The next says: Mey and Da-shwey are a perfect pair, with one heart they work for victory — ha! ha! — it's pears!"

The guests chuckled and clapped their hands appreciatively.

Again the master of ceremonies took the floor. "Bride and groom — report on how you made love!"

A veritable riot of cheers, applause and stamping of feet enthusiastically responded to this proposal. Da-shwey was hauled to his feet and dragged to the center of the room. Wearing a new army cap and a new grey cloth uniform, his face was redder than the big paper chrysanthemum pinned on his chest.

"What can I say?" he asked with a laugh. "We didn't make love."

"Confess!" shouted the crowd. "You must speak!"

"Really we didn't!" insisted Da-shwey.

"Let's hear it," yelled someone. "Did you kiss?"

"That's a fine question! We worked together for years like brother and sister. Not only didn't we kiss, we never even held hands!"

"Did you ever think you'd like to?" called Ru from the back of the room.

Da-shwey grinned and took courage. "I certainly did! I've loved her for a long time!" He snatched off his cap, bowed and fled.

"Now it's Mey's turn!" laughed the cadres.

The blushing girl was dragged forward by her friends. She wore a clean blue jacket over her everyday gown, with a big red paper flower on her bosom. Very embarrassed, she hung her head, and twisted her hair with her fingers. She couldn't bring herself to speak for several minutes.

"He loves me . . . ," she said finally, in a barely audible voice. "I don't know how many times my heart has repeated those words!" Mey flung herself into Miss Chen's arms. "I can't say any more!"

There was considerable clearing of throats and blowing of noses until the master of ceremonies made the next announcement. "Bride and groom — clasp hands!"

Like two waves, the men cadres propelled Da-shwey and the girl cadres pushed Mey to meet in the center of the room. Mey turned her scarlet face to one side as dozens of friendly hands grasped her arm and the arm of Da-shwey, forcing together the warm palms of the bride and groom. The guests applauded madly, and with much laughter, swept the rosy-cheeked couple into the bedroom. Joking and chuckling, the cadres inspected the bridal chamber and admired the eight-cornered red lantern which hung from the ceiling. Gradually, the guests all departed. The last one to go closed the door behind him.

*

The bride and groom were alone. Smiling and with lowered head, Mey sat on the edge of the *kang*. Da-shwey quietly bolted the door, then stood looking at her helplessly. She gazed at him out of the two deep dark pools that were her eyes, and her face glowed warmly in the reddish reflection of the lantern light.

"You must be tired," said Mey softly. "Rest a while."

Da-shwey sat down on a small bench beside the *kang*; he stared at her with fascinated adoration.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Haven't you ever seen me before?" demanded Mey blushing, but she dimpled in an involuntary smile.

"I was thinking of a few years ago when you used to visit your sister," he mused. "You still wore braids then. In the presence of a stranger you didn't dare raise your head. Later, when we were at the cadre school, I remember how you cried when you tried to make your first speech. We certainly were a couple of simpletons. It's funny to think of it."

"We were so terribly confused — all snarled up like a vine! Do you remember the time you smoked that forbidden cigarette?"

They both laughed. As they reminisced, the awkwardness between them dissolved. The flame in the lantern burned ever lower and the room was becoming darker. Da-shwey lay beside Mey on the *kang*. Her hot tears rained on his shoulders, as she gently caressed the scars on his body.

"Da-shwey," she whispered tenderly, "after you'd been tortured, the night they carried you back, I thought I would die of grief!" She buried her face in his neck. "You're so strong, so good! Like pure molten gold!"

"You and our comrades were wonderful to me — you lavished on me all your love and care," said Da-shwey in a voice that shook with emotion. "If you hadn't cherished me so patiently, I wouldn't be alive today!"

"Revolutionists are one big family — everyone is a dear relative!"

Da-shwey thought of his father and tears came to his eyes. "Ah, if *Dyeh* were only here to see us man and wife — how happy he would be! I wish we could have succeeded the first time, when your sister came to talk about our marriage!"

"I wanted to marry you then so much," said Mey softly, "but I had no choice!"

"Only the revolution was able to bring us together," said Da-shwey. He kissed her lovingly.

The lantern went out. Locked tightly in each other's arms, their hearts fused into one. For a long time the stillness of the room was broken only by their drowsy passionate murmurs.

*

When the news of the wedding of Mey and Da-shwey reached the ears of Jinlung in the walled town, he spewed his hatred to his crony Gwo.

"I always knew that bastard Da-shwey was up to something!" he raged. "I — his sister! I won't be happy 'til I show his insides with my knife!"

"He made you a cuckold long ago!" replied Gwo with a cold laugh.

"You'll see," grated Jinlung. "Sooner or later, I'll kill them both!"

An orderly appeared saying the commander wanted to see Jinlung at once. The puppets had taken over a Catholic church compound and had erected a tall tower fortress. Ho was living in a fine foreign style building in back of the fortress; it was there that Jinlung reported to him.

The commander was in a jovial mood. He said the KMT had notified him that "vanguards" were being formed to sneak into "bandit territory". They were to organize assassination groups to murder cadres in preparation for "recovering the lost territories". Ho's puppets would be paid to participate. In addition, the Japanese General Kamesaka had also given a large sum of money to encourage the venture. Ho presented Jinlung with a big wad of bills for initial expenses.

This was the kind of an assignment Jinlung liked best. "You won't go wrong in giving this job to me!" he boasted, pounding his inflated chest with his fist. He discussed strategy with Ho, then picked his men, drew equipment and set out.

A few days later, Mey collected over 100 pairs of cloth shoes which the peasant women had made for the militia. She tied the shoes into three bundles to take with her to the county government seat where she was going to attend a meeting. It was nearly dark and the bundles were heavy. Da-shwey and another cadre named Wang offered to help her carry them.

By the time they got started, night had fallen. There was no moon, only a sprinkling of stars; the road was barely visible. They were walking and chatting for about five minutes when Da-shwey held up a warning hand.

"Don't make any noise! Isn't that a man's shadow behind those grave mounds?"

"Where?" whispered Mey, but before Da-shwey had time to answer two shots rang out and a searing pain numbed her upper arm. Mey staggered and cried out.

"Down!" yelled Da-shwey. He dragged her and Wang with him to the ground, as another volley sent bullets whistling overhead.

"Those dirty mongrels!" swore Wang. "Mother's — ! Let's get those sons of bitches!"

He and Da-shwey fired at the direction of the flashes. The sound of the shooting brought other militiamen running from the village. The figures behind the grave mounds disappeared.

Blood was soaking Mey's sleeve, but through clenched teeth she insisted it wasn't serious. With Da-shwey supporting her, the cadres returned to the village. They guessed immediately that the sniping was the work of puppet spies.

Mey was sent to the local infirmary where her wound was dressed. Fortunately the bone had not been hit and she recovered rapidly.

*

Before long, there was another incident. It all started as a result of Syow, now a member of the district militia, not having any money to buy cigarettes. He stole a chicken from a peasant and was taking it to the market place to sell, when Twur caught him. The big militiaman flared into anger; he pummeled Syow hard. Syow was forced to return the chicken and apologize to its owner.

Syow smoldered with resentment, but said nothing. A few days later, pretending to be sick, he went home. Still hoping to raise some money, he borrowed a small boat and went fishing. There was a heavy fog that day; everything looked white and misty as far as the eye could see. Syow had cast his net and was hauling it back toward the boat, when he heard someone call him.

"Hey, Syow! What are you doing here?"

He looked around. There, in a little craft coming out of the reeds, was Jinlung with another man he didn't recognize. Frightened but not daring to flee, Syow took a grip on his shaken nerves.

Jinlung's boat drifted closer. After chatting idly a while, the puppet asked why wasn't he with his militia unit instead of fishing? Syow told him.

"If you fish all day, how much can you catch?" laughed Jinlung. "Don't waste your time. Here, take these few dollars for spending money!" Syow hesitated, but Jinlung pressed him generously, "We two brothers don't talk about 'yours' and 'mine' — go on, take it!"

Syow knew he would have to repay in one way or another, but what could he say? He accepted the money. Jinlung rowed away.

For the next three days Syow was afraid to leave his house. On the evening of the third day, Jinlung called on him, alone. Syow realized that it was a case of the weasel coming to pay his respects to the hen. He was very uneasy, but he had to entertain his unwanted visitor. Jinlung soon came to the point. He said the Ba Lu's days were numbered, that the Japs and puppets were coming to scourge the village, that they would kill all the cadres and district militiamen and build a new fortress tower on the old site.

Syow swallowed every word. "What shall I do?" he asked worriedly.

"You have nothing to fear!" replied Jinlung with a friendly smile. "None of the others will get away, but you're all right! Just keep in touch with me and I personally guarantee you'll be safe!"

He gave Syow a few packets of opium and departed.

The next night, Jinlung came again. "Syow," he said sympathetically, "I can't stand seeing you so poor! Let's organize a few men to do a little highway robbery. In our spare time we can kill a couple of cadres and take their guns. The Japs will reward us. What do you say?"

"I — I'll think it over," replied Syow.

Jinlung stood up to leave. "I wouldn't come here if I didn't have your welfare at heart, old brother. You have a lot to gain by working on our side. But I warn you, if you give me away, your whole family had better prepare to die!"

After Jinlung was gone, Syow pondered and fretted for hours. He didn't want to help the traitor but he didn't dare to expose him.

"Well, have you decided?" Jinlung asked on his next visit.

By now, Syow was infected; besides he couldn't see any way out. "You start your organization. I've practically made up my mind to join."

But Jinlung was not the kind to let go once he had sunk his teeth into something. He immediately gave Syow the job of rounding up recruits. Syow promised to do his best.

Two days later Jinlung again appeared. He had been drinking and his eyes were red and inflamed. "How many men did you get?" he inquired.

"I haven't found anyone of the right kind. I was afraid to take a chance on people who might harm us."

Jinlung stared at him coldly. "You are useless! You're not even a man! Never mind, never mind! You can look for some more later. Tomorrow we strike!"

"How are we going to do it?" asked Syow tremulously.

A murderous light shone from under Jinlung's scowling brows. "Everything is ready," he said fiercely. "We're going to smash their district headquarters, kill Twur, capture Da-shwey, and close our net tight around those other bastards!

Tomorrow night we'll go together and have the pleasure of wiping them off the earth!"

Syow's heart jumped and his skin twitched, but he pretended to be unconcerned.

"Aiya, I forgot to bring my gun," he said regretfully. "What use will I be empty-handed?"

"Pey!" spat Jinlung. "You can use these!" He handed Syow two Japanese hand grenades.

"What's the plan? What men do we have?"

Drunk as he was, Jinlung's mind was very clear. "Never mind about that," he said craftily. "Tomorrow night, when Orion is due south, you wait at the big willow tree beside the pool east of Hwang Hwa village. A man will come to meet you. He'll clap his hands three times to identify himself, then lead you to us."

Jinlung fixed burning eyes on Syow's pale face. "You know me," he said in a low intense voice. "If you do a good job and we succeed, I'll see to it that you're well repaid. If you fail me, don't complain later that my hand is black!" He flung some money on the *kang*, then strode quickly through the door.

Syow couldn't sleep all night; an unbearable weight seemed to be crushing his chest. In the morning he had no appetite for breakfast. His brow feverish, he lay listlessly on the *kang*. At noon Twur and Da-shwey, bringing chicken eggs and noodles, came to visit him. Da-shwey was disturbed at the sight of Syow's hot flushed face.

"What's wrong with you, Syow?" he asked. "You've gotten much thinner these past few days."

Twur unhappily took the sick man's hand. "I have a rotten temper. When I get mad, I don't know what I'm doing! I'm very sorry," he apologized. Da-shwey and the others criticized me and I admitted I was wrong. I hope you'll forgive me!"

"Don't talk like that," replied Syow with tears in his eyes. "It's all my own fault. I — I — really I'm ashamed to face you!" Sick at heart, he could force no more words through his constricted throat, but he cried so bitterly that the cadres made haste to comfort him.

"We all have faults," they soothed. "Once you correct them, then everything is fine. You take it easy for a while and as soon as you're feeling better come back to work. If anything is wrong, tell us. We'll definitely find a means to help you. All the comrades are worried about you. They want to come and see you."

Syow doggedly insisted there was nothing wrong. After again assuring him that he would be most welcome back in the militia, the cadres rose to go.

"We have a meeting tonight, but we'll look in on you in another day or so." Twur and Da-shwey took their leave.

As they strolled slowly out of his compound, Syow's mind ran riot. These men know nothing of the plot to treacherously destroy them . . . and they're so good! But I know! How can I keep silent! His blood rushed to his head. Forgetting his timidity, he leaped from the *kang*, and shouting, ran barefoot to catch up with his comrades at the compound gate. Bewildered, they went

back with him to the house. Although his terror swept back on him in a sickening wave, crying and shaken, he poured out the whole story.

Da-shwey and Twur returned to the village and discussed the matter with Jyow, the head of the district government. At first they thought of letting Syow keep his appointment with the spy while the militia watched from a distance, then follow the two to the rendezvous of the murder gang and catch the whole crew. But they were afraid the spy might see them, or that the terrorists might move before they could be surrounded by the militia. Finally, they decided to nab the spy first and make him reveal the meeting place of the gang.

Syow was secretly led to district headquarters, where his part in the plan was revealed to him. He became hysterical with fright and refused to cooperate. Only after Twur and Da-shwey pleaded with him and made some modifications in the original strategy did Syow reluctantly consent.

By the time Orion was due south, all of the district militia's preparations were completed. Syow squatted beneath the willow tree beside the designated pool. Soon a furtive figure appeared; he lightly clapped his hands three times. Syow stood up and walked toward him.

"Are you Syow?" asked the man, covering him with a Mauser.

"Yes. Where are we going?"

"Come with me."

Twur and Da-shwey, springing from the shadows, leveled their rifles at Syow and the spy. "If you make a noise we'll kill you! Drop your guns!"

"Here's my gun!" snarled the spy. He swung his arm, fired, whirled and fled.

Hoping to take him alive, the cadres followed in hot pursuit. But when the puppet began running toward the wheat fields, they were afraid they would lose him altogether. With three shots they dropped him dead in his tracks.

The district militia made a thorough search of the surrounding country but to no avail. Jinlung and his political bandits had flown when they heard the sound of the shooting.

Chapter XVII

The Big Fish Get Away — Spring and Summer, 1945

Almost as soon as Mey married Da-shwey, she became pregnant. By the beginning of 1945, Mey was heavy with child, but she continued her work of organizing the peasants to increase production. She ran from village to village, door to door, helping each peasant solve his individual production problems. She ignored all exhortations to rest.

One day when Mey returned home after a meeting, she felt terribly tired. She no sooner entered her room than she went into labor pains. Frightened at their suddenness and intensity, still standing, she screamed for the peasant woman in whose house she was boarding. The woman came running in, took one look at Mey and bustled into action.

"My mother! Why aren't you lying down?" she scolded as she supported Mey to the *kang*. "You've been working like crazy! In the last month too! Didn't you know your time was coming?"

"Production . . . very important," panted Mey, "don't do it well . . . can't beat the Japs!"

The woman shook her head. "You're giving your heart's blood for us peasants!"

A few minutes later, the child was born. It was a boy, pink and fat, with skin that looked like it had been powdered with fine white talcum.

The news spread fast, and women neighbors soon arrived with gifts of red candy, dates, rice and chicken eggs. They all wanted to hold the baby.

"Just look how healthy he is!" one whispered. "Large head and big ears — a sure sign that he's intelligent — the living image, the very shadow of Da-shwey!"

"And those eyes — how elegant!" cooed another. "Exactly like his mother!"

"It's true," added Mey's landlady, "a good onion has a pure white center and good parents have fine children!"

When Da-shwey was informed, he rushed home at once. Deliriously happy, he held the baby in his arms and couldn't look his fill at this wonderful creature. They decided on the pet name of Little Chubby. The formal name would be selected later on.

The next morning Mey urged Da-shwey to return to his office. She said there were plenty of women around to assist her taking care of the baby, that he shouldn't worry. With an effort, Da-shwey tore himself away and went back to work.

*

In the spring of 1945, responding to Chairman Mao's call to "shrink enemy held territory and expand the liberated areas", the regional army engaged in an offensive which resulted in the recapture of a great many places.

After attending a meeting of the regional government in May, Blacky Tsay called a conference of county and district cadres. He announced the defeat of the German and Italian fascists by the Soviet Union. The cadres went wild with joy.

"That leaves only the Japs!" they shouted. "We'll settle them in a hurry!"

When he could make himself heard, Blacky reported that the authorities had ordered the district and county militias to strike in concert with the regional army. The remaining enemy strongholds in the cities and walled towns were to be wiped out immediately!

Roars of approval and prolonged cheers greeted his words. Plans promptly were formulated to carry out the long awaited directive.

The county for which Blacky was responsible contained one city and one walled town. The Japs had already completely withdrawn from the town to the

city, except for one platoon of about 50 men. Together with a platoon of puppets the Japs maintained in the town a military headquarters post a few hundred yards north of the big south gate. In addition, there was a company of 150 puppets commanded by Ho, with Jinlung serving as his lieutenant. The First Platoon of this company, led by Gwo, lived together with Ho and Jinlung in a former Catholic church compound where two tall tower fortresses had been erected. Half of the Second Platoon was commanded by a man named Dung and was stationed in a fortress in the east part of town. Goupi was the leader of the other half which garrisoned a fortress in the west part of town. On the walls encircling the town, the soldiers of the Third Platoon manned eight pill-boxes and posted sentries in the intervals between them. Strictest military vigilance was practiced throughout.

Before it empties into Bayang Lake, the Fu River divided into two streams to form a hollow square around a large tract of land athwart its flow. The town is located on this island and the river creates a natural moat all around its walls. The only land approach is a bridge running to the east gate from the shore.

It was planned that the regional army would enter this gate, clean the puppets off the east and north walls, storm the fortress in the east part of the town and destroy the enemy in the Catholic compound in the center of the town. Blacky's county militia was to follow in and wipe out the Japs and puppets in the military headquarters post near the south gate. Da-shwey and Twur were to lead their district militia against the fortress in the west section of the town. The remaining district militias would take care of the puppets on the south and west walls. Moreover, the militias from two other counties were to guard the road from the city to prevent the Japs there from sending reinforcements.

The night scheduled for the attack, Blacky assembled the county and district militias combined under his command. Accompanied by an old man, an iron smith, he sought the group under Da-shwey and Twur.

"The bridge leading to the east gate is narrow," said Blacky. "It would be too costly to storm. The headquarters of the regional army has asked us to send someone into the town and open the gate from the inside. This old man knows how to do it. He was my teacher when I was learning to be a blacksmith and he's a native of the town. I want you to choose a comrade who's quick-witted and brave to accompany him. It's a very important job and it's dangerous. Who do you think can handle it?"

"Will I do?" asked Da-shwey.

"I'll go," said Twur quickly.

"Better not," laughed Blacky. "You two have to lead your militia."

Da-shwey suggested they send his brother Ru. Twur stamped his foot enthusiastically. "Right! The kid is clever and has lots of nerve! He'll do fine!"

Ru was summoned and asked whether he was willing.

"Of course!" he replied with a happy grin. "When do we start?"

"Here is a watch with a luminous dial," said Blacky. "At exactly twelve o'clock you must open the gate. The army will cover your escape across the bridge to the shore with a machine gun. Are you sure you can do it?"

The ironsmith was old and his stubbly beard was white but he was still big and powerful. A laugh boomed from his barrel of a chest. "I guarantee I'll open it! It's my life against the lock!" He looked Ru over tolerantly. "Well, little fellow, do you dare to go?"

Ru puffed out his cheeks and cocked his head to one side. "Why not?" he retorted indignantly. "I'm the guy who killed Iino the Jap at the fake wedding! If I don't do a good job of this, you can cut my head off!"

Blacky laughed. "All right, all right," he placated. "The job belongs to both of you — the old man and the youngster. If we take the town, you'll get first credit!" He took another watch out of his pocket. "This belongs to the regional command. Set the watch I gave you with it."

The preliminaries were completed. Delighted beyond words, Ru cockily strolled out of the compound with the old smith. Da-shwey walked after them; he put a friendly hand on his brother's shoulder.

"Ru," he said solemnly, "you're a little fellow who has to do a big job. It's very serious business! Think before you act and help the old man in every possible way. Be brave but be careful! Don't make any mistakes!"

The boy stood erect, raised his head and looked into Da-shwey's eyes. "Don't worry," he said confidently. "I'll either fulfil my duty or not come back!"

Da-shwey clapped him on the back. "You can do it! I'll be waiting to congratulate you!"

He stared after Ru and the ironsmith until they vanished in the night. Slowly he turned and walked back to his militia unit.

*

Ru and the smith walked along the shore of the river moat to a point opposite the northwest corner of the town wall. The water looked deep and fast. Ru offered to help the smith swim across, but the old man only smiled. Removing his clothes the smith held them out of the water while with one hand he paddled effortlessly to the strip of land skirting the wall. Ru followed in his wake.

The wall was about ten feet high. The section of it which confronted them sloped in a little; its surface was worn and pitted by years of exposure to the elements. Agilely, the smith climbed his way to the top as Ru struggled and clutched behind him. That old man is all right! thought Ru admiringly.

They dropped to the ground inside the town beside a large lotus pond. Skirting around it, the smith led Ru through the dark deserted back lanes to his house in the east part of the town. There they waited for over an hour.

At eleven o'clock, the old man sent his wife to look over the situation at the east gate. She returned and said that all was quiet. The smith took an iron crowbar and some pieces of torn cloth.

"What's that stuff for?" asked Ru as they set out.

"To open the gate with," grinned the old man.

Where the lane through which they crept reached the wide street leading to the east gate, they flattened themselves against the wall of the corner house and cautiously poked their heads out. They were only twenty yards from the entrance of the gate's pitch dark tunnel. The town wall was twenty feet thick.

The gate, which was a heavy door reinforced with iron bands, was at the outer end of a tunnel through the wall. But across the street, in front of the compound of a grocery shop, three puppet soldiers armed with rifles were whispering together.

"Of course, they're asleep!" said one heatedly. Two of the puppets scaled the low compound wall; the third paced back and forth outside, as if on guard.

The old smith knew that the proprietor of the shop was out of town; he guessed that the puppets had either gone in to steal or that they were after women. He and Ru waited until their nerves were on edge. The hands of their watch drew closer and closer together. There was no way they could dash for the tunnel without being seen by the puppet across the street. The old man was becoming frantic; then Ru got an idea. They discussed it in whispered haste. The smith approved and gave some directions. Ru walked quickly back up the lane.

Working his way stealthily through the narrow alleys, Ru emerged again on a corner of the same street several lanes further from the gate. He picked up a stone, flung it at the soldier and ducked back out of sight. The puppet, mystified, looked up and down the deserted street. A minute later, Ru hit him square in the back with a rock the size of his fist.

"Who's there?" yelled the soldier angrily.

Ru stepped into the open. "What kind of nice business are you guys up to!" he taunted saucily. He turned and fled into the lane. Cursing incoherently, the puppet pursued him.

The minute the coast was clear, the smith ran into the east gate tunnel. But it already was past midnight, and just then the regional forces outside, figuring that the plan to open the gate had failed, started to rush it. With five machine guns they swept the puppet fortifications on top of the wall above the gate. The enemy immediately responded, and the streets were filled with soldiers running to their various posts. Now the smith didn't dare to come out of the tunnel. His only chance was to open the gate. Quickly, he wrapped the pieces of cloth around the crowbar, and inserted it in the big lock which held the crossbar in place. With one strong expert heave the lock was opened. He dragged out the crossbar and pushed wide the gate.

"It's open, it's open!" he cried, rushing outside the wall.

Behind him, puppet soldiers pumped lead with their rifles while the enemy on the wall threw hand grenades at his darting figure. He flung himself on the ground, rolled a few yards, then leaped to his feet. Running south on the narrow strip of land along the outer surface of the town wall, he plunged into the river and swam across to safety.

Cheering, the men of the regional army, with rifles, mortars and machine guns, poured their fire in and around the open gate. The ardor of the enemy diminished rapidly.

Pistol in hand, a company leader jumped up. "Let's go!"

His men streamed behind him across the bridge to the town. A fierce rattle of machine guns from the besieged dropped several of the attackers. The company leader himself was wounded.

He painfully dragged himself erect. "Comrades, charge!" he shouted and staggered forward.

"Charge! Kill!" roared hundreds of throats as the company smashed through into the town.

Squad after squad came yelling across the moat; the puppets in the pill-box above the gate fled along the wall. Now inside, the troops bounded up the stairs to the top and secured their position. From this vantage point they stormed in both directions at enemy strongholds on the wall while pouring a withering fire at the soldiers in the streets. By dawn, the east and north walls had been swept clean.

*

At eight o'clock in the morning the regional forces began a general offensive within the town. The puppet Second Platoon in the fortress in the eastern section was surrounded. It was subjected to such a devastating barrage that not an enemy dared to show his head. Before long, a voice from the top of the fortress cried, "We're downing our arms!" Puppets began walking out into the street empty-handed, except for a few who carried neatly bound bundles of rifles. The last to emerge was Dung, the leader of the Second Platoon. He had voluntarily surrendered without any urging from his men. All of the puppets were sent to the rear lines.

Not far north of the town's south gate, Blacky Tsay's county militia had taken positions on the roofs of the houses all around the hollow square compound containing the headquarters post of the Japs and puppets. The militia steadily lobbed hand grenades into the compound until it hardly could be seen for the dense pall of black smoke rising heavenward. The enemy made several attempts to break out of this inferno but each time was blasted reeling back with terrible losses. Finally, the survivors hid themselves in the rooms and offered no further resistance. Through the shattered glass of the windows, they threw their rifles into the wrecked courtyard.

Leading a squad of his county militiamen, Blacky kicked open the compound gate and strode in. Trembling puppets were squatting in a corner of the house. Only after Blacky assured them that they would be well treated did they have the courage to rise.

But the Japs were nowhere to be seen. With his bayonet, one of the militiamen picked up the edge of a blanket trailing on the floor from a wooden frame bed. There under the bed was a Jap crouching with his head against the wall, his backside sticking up like a camel. Nothing would induce him to come out. At last, a couple of men took him by the legs and dragged him into the open. He promptly squatted and silently blinked at them out of a smoke-blackened face.

Another comrade patted a large gunny sack which he assumed contained grain; but it squirmed and twisted under his touch. A Jap who had crawled inside was holding the mouth of the bag closed with his hands. Two militiamen lifted the sack, turned it upside down and dumped him out.

A captured puppet pointed at the *kang*. Blacky swept aside the reed mat covering. He found that two Japs had removed some bricks from the top of the *kang* and had crept in. Extracted, the Japs were a comic sight. They were grey with ashes from head to foot.

"Where are your guns?" demanded Blacky.

The Japs stared at him stupidly, but made no reply. Continuing their search, the militia unearthed two semi-automatic pistols and three rifles in the *kang*.

*

In the western section of the town, the puppets on the south and west walls had surrendered, but the fortress under Goupi was stubbornly holding out. Because the district militiamen under Twur and Da-shwey's leadership were few in number and had no machine guns, the over-all regional army command ordered them to try to talk the puppets into giving up.

While surrounding the fortress, the district militiamen found Ru. He joined them as they crouched behind houses about 100 yards from the citadel. Da-shwey and Twur took turns shouting to the puppets.

"Hey! Puppet countrymen! We've occupied the town; why don't you give up your arms? Don't sell your lives to the Jap devils!"

They yelled until they were hoarse, but there was no response from the fortress.

"It's useless," said the militiamen. "We have to fight the sons of bitches!"

They opened with a volley of their rifles. The puppets returned their fire and the battle was on. The militiamen continued to call.

"Don't shoot! We're all Chinese! We treat our prisoners well! Down your guns!"

"Do you want our guns?" shouted Goupi from the top of the tower.

"That's right! Turn them over!"

"If you want them — come up and take them!"

Furious, the militiamen fought with increasing vigor.

When the situation was reported to the regional command, it dispatched a demolition squad of thirty men with 500 lbs. of dynamite in flour sacks. The district militiamen were ordered to help them dig a tunnel underneath the fortress. Work was immediately started from inside one of the houses nearest the cleared space around the fortress. To make sure that the tunnel would be dug straight, the leader of the demolition squad from time to time threw a hand grenade to a point in advance of the place to which the digging had progressed. Guided by the explosions, the men in the tunnel bored their way slowly forward until they were right under the fortress walls.

A wooden chest was pushed into the terminus, crammed full of dynamite — all 500 lbs. of it — and a long fuse was run back to the starting point. Da-shwey made a last appeal to the puppets to surrender.

"You'd better come out," he shouted in warning. "The fortress is mined! If you don't come out, you're going to dance!"

Goupi was sceptical of the militia's demolition ability. "What's a little dancing?" he yelled indifferently. "Let's see how you guys blast!"

The sun had already sunk to the tree tops. The fuse was lit and the besiegers scrambled to put distance between themselves and the fortress.

"Hurry, puppets!" called Da-shwey. "We've lit the fuse! It's going to blow in a minute!"

Two of Goupi's men wanted to jump, but the traitor held them back at the point of his gun.

"Stay here!" he ordered. "They can't hurt us — the Ba Lu is more useless than a fart! It's only a trick to scare us out!" He began to hurl taunts at the militia, and his voice came raucously from his noseless face. "You poor Ba Lu are finished and you don't know it! The devil is coming to drag you by your — to hell! . . . "

But before he could utter another syllable, a tremendous explosion lifted the entire fortress and flung it in the air. Broken tiles, bricks, wood, flew in all directions. Paper windows of every home for a mile around were torn to shreds by the blast.

As soon as the dust settled, the militiamen rushed in to salvage weapons. Of Goupi and most of his men there wasn't even a shadow left. Three or four dismembered corpses were found a considerable distance from the stronghold. The guns of the puppets had all been smashed to smithereens. Not one of them could be used again.

*

Only the Catholic church compound with its two tower fortresses remained in enemy hands. Militiamen outside the town repelled Jap and puppet troops sent as reinforcements from the city. Twur and Da-shwey were ordered to take their men to the mainland opposite the west wall, and rest. Da-shwey told Twur to take command; he himself with a small group of militiamen joined the troops closing in on the compound. We have it completely surrounded, he thought delightedly. Ho and Jinlung and the rest of those bastards won't get away this time!

The compound fronted on a wide street in the middle of the town and was enclosed by a wall eight feet high. There was a puppet sharpshooter on top of each of the towers. With Jap .38 rifles they picked off anyone who ventured into the street. A couple of peasants rushed past the compound to get out of the battle zone. Two shots killed two of them as they ran. Enraged at this wanton slaughter of civilians, the regional command ordered four of its sharpshooters to the roof of a building diagonally opposite the towers. Crouching behind sandbags, they aimed at the peephole in the masonry on top of the east tower. Although it was already dusk, their first volley crumpled the enemy marksman.

"Mother's — !" sneered the puppet on the west tower. "That stinks! If any of you think you can shoot, let's see you try your skill against the old master!"

Da-shwey recognized Jinlung's voice; his anger flared so wildly he could hardly see. He heard one of the army marksmen grimly reply, "Save your curses! I'll match you shot for shot!"

"Good!" shouted Jinlung. "We'll see who is the hero! I'll stand this roof tile on end. If you hit it I'll give up my rifle!"

"I'll do the same. You shoot first!" The marksman set up his tile on top of the sandbags.

Jinlung shattered it with one shot.

"Not bad, eh?" he crowed. "Now it's your turn!" As he spoke he raised his hand to place a tile on the parapet. Before he could let go, a rifle cracked and a bullet tore through the tile and his hand together.

Cheers and laughter from the regional troops drowned the sound of Jinlung's savage swearing. But the time for serious business had come. Night had fallen and the regional command ordered that the compound with its towers must be taken before dawn.

The besiegers immediately barraged the enemy stronghold with a torrent of mortar, machine gun and rifle fire. The puppets fought back, and the whine of bullets and boom of shells were deafening. Necklaces of pockmarks circled every enemy peephole in the towers. Bullets kept finding their marks, felling puppet after puppet.

Ho refused to surrender, but he knew it was only a question of time. After a private consultation with his henchman Gwo, Ho addressed his men. He announced that word had just been received from the city that relief would arrive the next morning and that they must hold out until then. This was a lie, but he emphasized his order by threatening to shoot any man who wavered. The battle continued with unabated fury.

In a building near the west tower, the regional troops set up a big fire hose and hand pump. They filled the tank with a drum of gasoline and sprayed the tower from top to bottom, at the same time peppering it with mortar shells. Bursting into flames, it became a roaring pillar of fire. Then, the same treatment was given the east tower, with equally murderous effect.

A strong wind, whipping across the North China plains, drove black heavy clouds before it. The regional army continued to fight as rain began to fall in sheets. But when the rain changed to hail stones as big as fists, the order was given for the men to take cover indoors.

Da-shwey chafed impatiently. He was sure, he said, that there weren't many of the enemy left. If his superiors would let him take his militiamen, he would go in and capture the puppet leaders. The regional commander granted his request and said that they could accompany a platoon which he had just ordered to go in and reconnoiter.

In the blinding rain, Da-shwey's squad crept to the northeast corner of the compound wall, set up a ladder and climbed into the rear courtyard. Cautiously they crawled through the weeds to the church, the one building still intact. The only sound they could hear was the hissing of the embers of the gutted towers and the pelting of the rain. Suspecting a booby-trap, they made no attempt to open the back door, but worked their way around to the high front portals. The doors were wide open. As Da-shwey stepped across the dark threshold, he tripped over something. It was a machine gun.

The men turned on their flashlights and searched. Empty holsters and cartridge belts hung on the walls of the church and vestry. Ashes of a pile of burned papers lay in the middle of the floor. Chairs and tables had been overturned; drawers and their contents were scattered. But the enemy was gone.

*

Ho, his concubine, Gwo, Jinlung and about twenty men had planned their escape even before the towers were set on fire. When the regional forces took cover from the hail storm, the traitors cut a hole in the compound wall and fled west. After wading across the lotus pond, they reached the town wall. Jinlung,

barefooted, scaled to the top and hauled one others up with a thick rope. He then tied one end of it to an outside parapet, and the puppets, by turn, slid down the rope to the narrow bank of the river moat. Peering through the night mists, they could discern the dim figures of some militiamen on the opposite bank. Twur's men had been assigned to patrol the west shore to prevent the escape of any of the enemy, and these militiamen comprised one of his squads.

Ho's shrewd mind worked fast. He unslung his rifle and began beating his concubine with its strap while reviling her in a loud voice.

"Mother's — ! You filthy traitor! I've caught you — now keep moving!"

The leader of the militia squad, Jumpy Ma, leveled his gun at the puppets across the moat. "Give the password!" he bawled.

"Who cares about the lousy password!" yelled Ho. "We're from regional headquarters and we've captured Ho's concubine! We're soaking wet and we're cold! Hurry and bring us some boats!"

Suspecting nothing, Jumpy and his men immediately rowed over in three small craft. Ho shoved the woman to the shore and dragged her into one of the boats with him.

"You stinking slut!" he raved. "Do you still think you can escape!"

When the puppets boarded the boats, Ho ordered the militia to head for the mainland. As the men wielded the oars, Ho turned to Syow who was sitting beside him.

"Let me see your rifle," he said with a friendly smile. He took the weapon, weighed it judiciously with his hands. "Why, this gun is no good!" said Ho, and he threw the rifle into the water.

"What did you do that for?" exclaimed Syow excitedly.

Ho laughed merrily. "You shouldn't use an old wreck like that. We've captured some excellent pieces. I'll give you a real good one when we get to headquarters!"

The boats reached the mainland, and the puppets scrambled up the dyke which fringed the shore.

"We're going to Little Plum Village. I want four men as an escort!" Ho ordered.

There were five men in the squad to begin with. When Jumpy and Syow and two other militiamen started off with the puppets, that only left a man named Wang to continue the patrol. Wang noticed that one of the traitors, lagging behind, had entered a peasant's shanty on the dyke. A moment later an old man hurried out. He ran up to Wang and seized him by the arm.

"That soldier doesn't act like one of our men!" the peasant whispered urgently. "He's taking my clothes and bedding! No Ba Lu ever did a thing like that!"

Wang rushed into the shanty and found the traitor with his hands full of stolen goods. He shoved his pistol against the puppet's chest.

"No noise!" he warned. "Who are you men? Talk fast!"

"Don't shoot! I'll tell you! The head of our party is Ho!"

Nearly beside himself with anger and disappointment, Wang knew it was no use to pursue the traitors alone. He took the puppet's rifle, gave his own pistol to the old man to guard the prisoner, and flew back along the dyke to report.

Meanwhile, Da-shwey and his group had discovered the rope by which the enemy had climbed the town wall. They followed the trail across to the west bank where they met Twur and the district militiamen. Just as Da-shwey was relating how the puppet leaders had escaped, Wang came running up with the news that Ho and his gang were heading west along the embankment with four captured militiamen!

Twur and Da-shwey held a quick council of war. They decided a pursuit by water would be fastest. Thirty men piled into three big boats. When word spread that it was Ho they were after, the peasant soldiers sent the boats leaping forward with powerful sweeps of their oars.

*

As the militia "escort" trudged ahead of the party of puppets, Jumpy Ma realized that they were not going in the direction of Little Plum. The further they walked the more suspicious he became. He looked around at the traitors behind him. Their guns were trained on the militiamen!

Damn it! thought Jumpy, these guys are puppets! How could we have been so dumb! We even sent boats to bring them ashore! Furious with himself, his eyes smarted with angry tears. But we can't let them get away! I must figure out . . .

Jumpy stopped. "We can't go this way," he said to the traitors. "The section ahead is mined."

"You go first then," they replied.

Desperately stalling for time, he pretended that there were mines everywhere, and led the puppets in a slow zigzag route along the top of the dyke. He hoped that they were being chased and that this would give the pursuers a chance to catch up.

In the dark, Syow managed to get a close look at some of the traitors. His heart sank as he recognized Gwo and Jinlung. And that fat guy in back of me, the one who threw my gun in the water, must be Ho! he thought miserably. I have to kill him! Even if it costs my own life, it'll be worth it! Torn between fear and determination, Syow could barely walk for the trembling of his legs.

"Faster, you son of a bitch!" Ho barked, shoving him roughly from behind.

That push was the last straw. Enraged into action, Syow began unloosening a hand grenade from his belt.

"What are you doing?" yelled Ho.

Syow whirled around, clutched him by the throat with one hand and with the other smashed the grenade against Ho's chest. But he was so flurried he had forgotten to pull the firing pin first and the grenade didn't explode. Ho twisted free and whipped out his pistol. At close range he put a bullet through Syow's head. . . .

A full moon emerging from behind the clouds, bathed the countryside in its pale light. After rowing hard for about fifteen minutes, the militiamen pulled into shore and climbed the embankment. There was no sign of the enemy.

There hadn't been much rain that year; the river was low. A little further ahead it swung away from the dyke, leaving a long stretch of dry ground densely covered with high reeds.

"We have to be careful," said Da-shwey to Twur. "Those reeds are a perfect place for an ambush. Send three men ahead as scouts. The rest of us will walk along the inner slope of the dyke."

Cautiously, the militiamen moved forward. A few minutes later one of the scouts returned.

"There's a body up ahead!"

"Can you make out who it is?"

"No."

Twur and Da-shwey clambered to the top of the dyke and ran to where the other scouts were standing. Sprawled head first on the outer slope, his hand still tightly clenching a grenade, Syow lay dead.

"Why didn't we hear the shot?" asked Twur.

"Our oars must have been making too much noise," said Da-shwey. He leaned down and placed his hand on Syow's neck. "The body is still warm. They can't be far away. Let's hurry!"

Twur again sent the scouts on ahead. The militiamen trotted behind on the sloping inner side of the embankment. Suddenly a voice rang out from the reeds.

"Password!"

The scouts slid down the side of the dyke as a volley of bullets whistled over their heads. Crouching, the rest of the militiamen ran up, flung themselves prone beside the scouts and began firing at the enemy on the other face of the embankment. Separated by twenty yards of piled earth, neither side could inflict any casualties on the other.

"It's too bad we didn't bring any hand grenades," said Da-shwey regretfully. "This way we can fight all night and not get anywhere!"

He conferred with Twur. They decided that the latter would take half the militiamen, go forward well beyond the puppets, cross to the outer side of the dyke and attack the enemy's flank. Hugging the slope, Twur and his men hurried forward along the embankment. But Twur was excited and miscalculated the distance. In less than a minute, he led his militia swarming across the dyke only ten yards beyond the enemy. As the startled puppets turned to meet this unexpected onslaught, Da-shwey waved his group over the top in a frontal assault. Before the traitors knew what was happening to them, the militiamen ripped away their weapons and tied them up with their own leg bindings.

Jumpy Ma and the remaining two men who had been forced to escort the puppets all had been wounded in the fighting. The traitors had taken their guns and bound their hands behind their backs. Jumpy cried and stamped his feet.

"Ai! Ai! Mother's — !" he raged bitterly. "Just a while ago the bastards found a couple of boats. They left these guys behind as a rear guard. Ho, his concubine, Jinlung and Gwo all escaped!"

Chapter XVIII

The Paths Cross — Summer, 1945

The next morning all of the Jap prisoners were assembled in the large courtyard of a temple in the south section of the town. Bare-headed and bare-footed, their clothes ripped, their faces filthy, the Japs squatted together. They kept their heads down and said nothing.

A young Ba Lu brought soap, towels, basins of water, a few small mirrors. The prisoners immediately stood up. They took the mirrors first and examined themselves from every angle. The reflection of their red mouths and white eyes in grimy black faces was rather funny, but the Japs never changed their solemn expressions. However they hastened to wash thoroughly. Then they were given clean clothes and shoes.

"Ba Lu very good!" said the prisoners as they changed. "Thank you, thank you!"

Militiamen led the Japs into a room in the temple to be interviewed. There, Dean Cheng received them in a friendly manner. He was now the political commissar of regional headquarters.

A few of the Japs could speak a little broken Chinese; some of them knew how to write, and the interview was conducted without any difficulty. The prisoners said that they had left home over four years ago. They lived well when they first came to China, but now everything was bad. Even their rice portions at meals had been cut to one small bowl per man. Japanese soldiers, they stated, are servants to their officers. The men must carry water, serve food and do all kinds of menial jobs for their superiors. Discipline is strict and harsh. Jap soldiers did nothing but think of home.

When Dean Cheng asked them about their families, they produced snapshots of their wives and children. One of the prisoners, whose name was Yamamoto, said both his two brothers had been killed in China. Misty eyed, he said he wished he could go home again.

The most talkative prisoner was a former metal worker called Yoneda. He described himself as "a lively fellow".

"Japanese Army all know," he chattered rapidly as he drew a large circle on a piece of paper, "you China big, big!" He inscribed a small circle next to the large one. "Us Japan little, little! You big, big China to us little, little Japan . . . " He thumped his fist against his chest, closed his eyes and collapsed dramatically in his chair.

The men couldn't help laughing. Yoneda waved his hands emphatically.

"No use, no use! Lose, lose!" He said that in the battle for the town most of the Jap soldiers hadn't even fired their guns.

The Chinese and Japanese people should unite to destroy Japanese imperialism, Dean Cheng explained. The prisoners nodded their heads. Yoneda said he would like to join the Japanese Anti-War League in the liberated area. Most of the other captives expressed the same wish. Only Yamamoto was afraid that this would delay his early return home. He begged permission to join the Jap forces in the city.

One of the prisoners, a tall peasant, remained silent throughout the interview. Asked what he wanted to do, he nervously twisted his thick lips and said he would go with Yoneda. Suddenly he changed color and jumped to his feet. He was staring at Da-shwey who had just entered. Da-shwey recognized him as a member of the squad which had captured and tortured him during the first big "mopping-up" campaign staged by the Japs.

"Do you remember me?" asked Da-shwey with a laugh.

Still staring, the Jap slowly backed away.

"Don't be afraid," smiled Da-shwey. "We Ba Lu treat our prisoners well. You beat me that time, but I'm not going to do anything to you."

In a good imitation of old-fashioned Chinese courtesy, the Jap clasped his hands before him and bowed low. Embarrassed, Da-shwey shook hands with the Jap in the usual manner.

"That kind of thing's not necessary. We're on the same side now — brothers in one family. Our enemy is the Japanese warlords." Turning to Dean Cheng, he reported that coffins had been prepared for the dead Japs and puppets.

"Those of you who are wounded can go to the infirmary," Dean Cheng said to the prisoners. "The bodies of the dead will be sent to the city. Do you want anything else?"

The Japs rose as one man and made him a deep bow. Yoneda had a request. He said, "Please be careful not to lose the numbered disks, which all the Japanese soldiers wear." Otherwise, he added, the bodies could not be identified. Dean Cheng replied that he would give the necessary instructions.

A good meal was served to the prisoners. Everyone ate heartily except Yamamoto. He sighed incessantly and barely touched his food.

After breakfast, the prisoners who had volunteered were escorted to the local branch of the Japanese Anti-War League. A squad of district militia led Yamamoto to the outskirts of the enemy-held city and released him. He walked away along the dyke a short distance, then stopped. Sobbing, he began to pace back and forth. Suddenly, before anybody could halt him, he threw himself into the river and drowned.

*

When Ho, Jinlung and crew reached the Jap-held city, Gwo was made commander of a fortress guarding one of the approaches to the city. About a month later, Mey learned that Gwo and his squad leader Gulu both were rivals for the bed of a girl named Orchid. At one time Orchid had been a member of a village Women's Association which Mey had organized. Mey had gotten to know the girl quite well. Now she volunteered to go and use her friendship with Orchid to lay the groundwork for the coming attack on the fortress by the militia. If I can settle Jinlung at the same time, she thought, so much the better!

Because Mey had operated so successfully in enemy territory before, the comrades approved of her making the venture. But they warned her that this would be her most dangerous assignment and pleaded with her to be especially careful.

Mey was extremely confident. She even decided to bring her five-month-old baby with her. Little Chubby had not been weaned and still needed her atten-

tion. Besides, said Mey, a woman with an infant would be the last one the enemy would suspect of being a secret agent.

Carrying the baby and a concealed pistol, she set out at dusk the next day. Dressed in a voluminous flowered jacket and trousers, Mey looked the typical country cousin going to visit relatives in the city. A guide led her to a house in a hamlet outside the walls. There she was welcomed by an elderly woman — Mrs. Chen, the mother of Miss Chen, Mey's former teacher at the school for cadres.

"Ma" Chen was a warm-hearted old lady with a great enthusiasm for the revolution. Furthermore, she was related to Orchid, although she hadn't seen the girl for several months.

In the week that followed, on three different occasions Mey sent Ma Chen to the city outskirts to visit Orchid. Each time, in accordance with Mey's instructions, the old lady kept the conversation in general channels. When she returned home, Ma reported Orchid's every word in detail.

The purpose of these visits was to enable Mey to have some basis for judging whether Orchid would betray her if they met. After Ma's third trip Mey still wasn't quite sure.

"Do you think, if you invited Orchid here and she saw me, there'd be any trouble?" she asked the old lady.

"I'm sure it would be all right," said Ma Chen. "Orchid is my niece. While she may not be willing to help, she'd never do anything to hurt us."

Mey decided to risk it. The next night the old lady brought her niece home with her. When Orchid saw Mey, she looked at her in amazement.

"Why, it's our Chairman! What are you doing here?"

Mey only laughed and pulled Orchid to sit beside her on the *kang*. Although she knew the story very well, Mey began to ask about Orchid's family affairs. She said she heard that Orchid had gotten married. How were things going?

The questions hit a sore spot in Orchid's heart; she poured out her troubles. She related how during the "mopping-up" campaign the Japs had burned her parents' home. Her family became completely destitute and had to beg for food. Finally, as a last resort, her father had married her to a man ten years her senior. The husband turned out to be a good sort, but two months after the marriage the Japs seized him for work on one of their construction jobs. For trivial thing he said or did — Orchid never could find out what — they killed him. Piece by piece, she sold every stick of furniture for food. . . . Orchid rarely had chance to tell her sorrows to another woman. By the time she finished, her eyes were red with weeping.

"It was all because of the Japs, wasn't it?" said Mey. "Unless they're driven out of China, no one will ever be able to live in peace again."

"You used to be an active member of the resistance movement," Mey continued. "Whether it was digging pits, ripping up roads, making shoes and clothing for the militia — you never fell behind. Your history is an honorable one; don't compromise it now!" she urged.

"Ai! I know I've become worthless!" said Orchid. "But what can I do? After the Jap drive, I lost touch with our people. I thought, the Communists and the Ba Lu are fine; but they'll never beat the Japs. We peasants'll just have to take it — dry-eyed! But recently I heard the Ba Lu captured the walled town and I'm beginning to have hope again!"

Mey told her of the great improvements in the military and political situation. Then she asked Orchid a very personal question.

"What's the idea of having two lovers — and both of them puppets too?"

Orchid sighed. "They keep coming to see me," she said, embarrassed. "Usually they're drunk and quarrelsome. I'm afraid to offend them. . . ." Gradually, she revealed to Mey all the details of her relationship with Gwo and Gulu.

Mey offered her a plan which would solve her difficulties. It took a great deal of persuasion, but Orchid finally consented to try. She returned home in the early hours of the morning.

*

Jinlung's cruel efficiency as head of the plain clothes squad found favor in the eyes of both his Jap and puppet bosses. Although Gwo once had shot him in an argument over a woman, they were now fast friends, thanks to Ho's mediation. The day following Orchid's visit to Mey, Jinlung came for a stay with Gwo in the fortress.

Gulu took advantage of his rival being busy and hurried to call on Orchid. He found her lying motionless on the *kang* with her face to the wall. Though she wasn't sleeping, when he shook her gently she made no response. Gulu tugged his ear lobe and scratched his head.

"What have I done to offend you?" he demanded worriedly. "Why don't you speak to me?"

Orchid sat up. "Don't hold it against me," she pleaded tearfully, "but Commander Gwo says if he finds out that I've been sleeping with you again, he'll beat me to death! Take pity on me and leave at once!"

"I — his grandmother!" flared Gulu. "Who the hell does he think he is? What is it to him what you and I do!"

"That's right!" said Orchid dabbing her eyes. "I'm a good girl, not a 'broken shoe'! He doesn't own me; why can't I be in love with anyone I want?"

Gulu urgently grasped her arm. "Who do you love?"

"Hmph! That guy!" Orchid pouted. "I've never seen such a face full of pockmarks!"

"What about me?" persisted Gulu hungrily.

"You?" she mused, looking at him sideways out of half-closed eyes. "I'm afraid you're a ribless umbrella — you won't be able to stand up in the storm! We ought to part now before I become too mad about you!"

"Do you want me to die of love?" murmured Gulu, passionately wrapping her in his arms.

Orchid giggled and pressed the tip of finger against his forehead. "I'm more worried that you'll kill me with it!"

Gulu closed his eyes blissfully. "As long as you love me dear, I'll do anything you want!"

Orchid broke from his embrace. "If you really want to please me, you'll make contact with the Ba Lu and destroy Gwo! Back with our own people we can act like honest Chinese again. I'll even marry you. If you don't have the nerve to go through with it, stay away from me — forever! Whatever I do

will be no business of yours! Just say the word and we'll separate right now!"

"Don't talk about parting," Gulu begged. "I've found Jap rice hard to swallow for a long time. How can we make the contact?"

"What you say sounds good," said Orchid, staring at him with cold intensity, "but how do I know you're not fooling me? Swear!"

"You — you — !" Gulu stamped his feet exasperatedly, but he took his oath. "Above is heaven, below is earth and a true heart is in the middle! May I be shot if I'm lying to you!"

Then Orchid told him where she had been the night before. An hour later she brought him to Ma Chen's house outside the fortress. Very ashamed, Gulu hung his head on seeing Mey again.

"I've behaved disgracefully the past few years," he said in a low voice. "If the Ba Lu is generous enough to forgive me, I'd like to come back to the right side."

"Working for the enemy is a serious crime," replied Mey. "But if you're willing to prove your repentance by hard work in the resistance movement, the Ba Lu will accept you." She told him of the victories which they were winning on the military and political fronts.

"The Ba Lu has come a long way from the days when I was with the guerrillas," marveled Gulu. "The job of a puppet has nothing to offer any more. I don't get enough to eat; even our cheap uniforms haven't been changed in two years! Mother's — ! That bastard Gwo grinds us beneath his heel! I'm not boasting — if the Ba Lu will back me up, I'll kill the son of a bitch! You'll see if I don't!"

Mey recommended that he organize a few more puppets who felt the same way he did, and prepare to stage a revolt in the fortress. When he had everything in readiness, he should call on her again. She would fix a time for the puppet uprising and the Ba Lu attack to start simultaneously.

"We'd like to catch traitor Jinlung too," she added. "So keep your net ready to drop it on that stinking fish if you get the chance!"

*

Gulu went back to the fortress and told the plan to his friend Jan. Jan had often privately expressed his dissatisfaction with his life as a puppet. As Gulu expected, the man was fully willing to cooperate. While they were talking Jinlung entered, drunk and in an expansive mood. He insisted that Gulu have a drink with him and Gwo in the rear courtyard. Reluctantly, Gulu joined their party.

After they had been drinking steadily for about half an hour, Gwo thought of Orchid. He sent his bodyguard to fetch her, but she begged off saying she wasn't feeling well. Gwo shot a nasty glance at Gulu.

"I've been busy the past couple of days," he laughed coldly. "I might have known some guy would go sneaking around behind my back. Who knows what the bastard's been up to!"

Gulu kept his nose in his wine cup and pretended not to have heard. Always glad to stir up trouble, Jinlung added fuel to the flames.

"I think your wine must be a little bitter, Gwo old man!" he sniggered.

Gwo's face turned a fiery red. "Bitter, my arse!" he roared, pounding the table. "I'll show him what it is to eat bitterness!"

Fear and hatred struggled in Gulu's bosom. Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he laughed lightly. "A girl's heart is very complicated. Nobody can tell what she'll do next!"

Gwo smashed his wine cup down on the table. "Don't you try to play innocent!" he shouted waving his finger under Gulu's nose. "Do you think I don't know?"

"I'm not playing anything," retorted Gulu. "If she doesn't want to come, what's that got to do with me?"

The effrontery of a squad leader talking back to a company commander was too much for Gwo. Leaping to his feet, he slapped Gulu's face and reviled his ancestry back eighteen generations. Jinlung didn't want the matter to go any further. He pulled the drunken Gwo into an adjoining empty room.

Gulu had done considerable drinking too. Smarting under the slaps and curses, he paced the floor unsteadily. "Oh, a tough guy!" he muttered to himself. "Nobody dares say anything to you, eh! Well, pretty soon you won't be so tough! Let's see how many days your head stays on your shoulders!" He staggered back to the front courtyard.

But he had been talking rather loud, and on the other side of the thin partition, Jinlung heard it all. Jinlung figured that this sounded like more than the mere empty belligerence of a drunk. He quickly followed Gulu and stationed himself outside the open window of Gulu's ground floor room.

"I can't wait any longer," he heard Gulu saying angrily to Jan. "I'm going to fix the time the first thing in the morning! Nothing short of wrecking that son of a bitch will satisfy me!"

Jan was swatting mosquitoes with his fan. "Not so loud!" he cautioned. "If this gets out, it won't be any joke!"

Jinlung didn't have to stay to hear any more. He went looking for Gwo.

That night about one o'clock in the morning, puppet soldiers burst into the room where Gulu and Jan were sleeping. The two were bound with their hands behind their backs and shoved into a big room in the rear courtyard of the fortress compound. Gwo and Jinlung were waiting for them.

They questioned Jan first, but he would admit nothing. Jinlung ordered that he be hung by his thumbs from the rafter.

Realizing that he had been discovered, Gulu shook like chaff in a sifter. "I don't know anything!" he chattered. "I — I — I — was drunk! I don't know what I said!"

Gwo raised his rifle and slammed home the bolt. "All right, this bastard won't talk either! . . . "

Winking at the puppet commander, Jinlung stayed his hand. "Don't be afraid, Gulu old man!" he said in a friendly tone. "The Ba Lu has a generous policy, but so have we. Make an honest confession and you'll be saved. You know I have plenty of influence at Jap headquarters. In fact you might say it's up to me who lives and who dies! Well, I'm giving you a chance to live, so speak up quickly!"

Gulu's head was sunk upon his chest. Beads of sweat rained steadily from his brow. Completely broken in spirit he flopped to his knees, tears streaming from his eyes.

"Only spare my life," Gulu sniveled between sobs," and I'll tell everything!"

"I guarantee it!"

Gulu spilled the whole story. Hanging from the rafter, Jan burst into hopeless tears.

When Gwo heard how Orchid and Gulu plotted to murder him, the pock-marks on his face turned crimson. Staring terribly, he grasped his rifle and strode toward the kneeling, quaking Gulu. Gulu's eyes rolled madly in mortal terror. Embracing Gwo's legs, he cried and pleaded for mercy. Gwo kicked him sprawling, then viciously plunged his bayonet again and again and again . . .

*

As the eastern sky was turning grey, a squad of puppets arrested Orchid. At the same time Jinlung led a group of men to Ma Chen's house and surrounded it. The old lady had just gotten up and Mey was nursing the baby on the *kang* when the pounding on the door started.

"I'll go see who it is," said Ma Chen, suspecting nothing. She opened the compound door. A group of armed men brushed her aside and came pouring into the courtyard.

Looking through the window, Mey saw Jinlung striding toward the house. Her heart leaped within her. She put the baby down on the *kang* and drew her pistol from under the pillow. Running barefooted, she hid herself behind the door of the room. A moment later, Jinlung entered, a Mauser in his hand. Clenching her teeth, Mey took a quick bead at the back of his head and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked loudly against the dud bullet in a missfire. Jinlung whirled toward the sound and grabbed for the pistol, but Mey held it with a death grip. As Jinlung began pulling stronger, she bit hard into his index finger. He snatched back his hand in pain; the wrench snapped his finger to the bone. Several more puppets rushed in, and Mey was overpowered.

Waving his right hand in agony, Jinlung glared at her murderously. Suddenly he picked up a loose tile from the *kang* and smashed it against Mey's head. She fell senseless to the ground.

All the noise and excitement alarmed the baby on the *kang*. He began to cry.

"Die, you little bastard!" rasped Jinlung, snatching him up. He flung the child to the floor and demanded the bayonet of one of the puppets.

"What does a little kid like that know?" said the man gruffly. "Forget about it!"

By now the terrified infant had cried himself hoarse; he had no more tears left to shed. When Ma Chen hobbled forward on her bound feet and cradled the baby in her arms, Jinlung turned his wrath against her.

"This old bag must be in on it! Take her along too!"

Mey revived as the puppets were binding the old lady. "Ma Chen has nothing to do with this!" she cried. "Either you let her go, or I won't move from this spot if I have to die here!"

Impatiently, Jinlung yanked the baby from the old woman and thrust him upon one of the puppets. He kicked Ma Chen to the ground and brutally stamped on her several times. Then the group began its return to the city.

Mey's hands were trussed at her sides with a long rope, the free end of which was held by a puppet who walked behind her. Men with rifles and bayonets flanked her on both sides. After they had gone about half the distance, Mey noticed an old man drawing water from a well by the side of the road. Claiming to be very thirsty, she pleaded for a drink. The puppet holding the rope led her to the well. Mey ripped the rope from his hands and leaped.

But her attempt at suicide failed, for the water wasn't deep and she had jumped feet first. Cursing the puppet who let Mey get away, Jinlung ordered the old man to descend into the well and bring her out. A few minutes later the old man was raised to the surface.

"She refuses to come up," he said.

Holding his Mauser in his left hand, Jinlung pointed it down the well shaft. "Come out of there, you cheap slut," he howled, "or I'll kill you!"

"Dog of a traitor!" yelled Mey. "Go ahead and shoot! I'd rather die than fall into your hands! Kill me and I'll be happy!"

Jinlung aimed and fired twice. The first shot struck her right shoulder and nicked her collar bone. The second shot, slashing open the rim of her ear, crimsoned the well with her blood. But the cold clean water quickly stopped the bleeding, and much against her will, Mey continued to live.

Finally, Jinlung had to send two puppets into the well. They hauled out the kicking, clawing Mey and eventually got her to the city.

Chapter XIX

All-out Attack — Autumn, 1945

A few days after Mey was captured, China's best friend — the Soviet Union — declaring war on Japan, joined forces with the Ba Lu, and in a very short time defeated the Japs in the Chinese Northeastern Provinces. But even after their surrender, the Japs and puppets refused to leave the cities or turn over their arms.

Blacky Tsay was Communist Party secretary of the county in which was situated the city where Mey was being held. He called a meeting of all key cadres in the county and said that if the enemy refused to give up its weapons — wipe it out! Commander-in-chief Chu Teh, announced Blacky, had just issued an order incorporating all militia units into the regular army. Every city must be taken; in their county they must prepare to attack immediately!

Da-shwey returned to his district to arrange for his militia to make the change over. He hoped they could take the city soon, for he had heard that Mey was captured and he was terribly worried about her. Moreover, the city

to him was a symbol of the last enemy strongholds in China. Once it was taken he felt there would be peace and normal life again.

When he announced the decision reached at the county meeting, the cadres danced for joy. "Good, good! It's nearly over! Let's finish them off! . . . Hey! The little Japs are dewdrops that can't stand the sunlight! . . . It's wonderful! We're in the regular army now!"

Even Jumpy Ma said nothing about going home to see his wife first, but packed his equipment with as much will as any of the militiamen. "I'm a regular Ba Lu now," he grinned to Ru. "The next guy who calls me 'Jumpy' gets a punch in the head!"

Each man carrying three captured rifles slung across his back, the militia marched off to county headquarters. Twur and Da-shwey remained behind to raise more troops. It proved to be an easy task. As a result of the rent and interest reduction law, all the peasants were prospering and their anti-Jap sentiments were strong. In less than 24 hours, over 150 volunteers swelled the ranks of the new district militia. They marched off with Da-shwey and Twur before dawn to a previously designated destination.

*

By noon the recruits had circled around the city and reached a little village three miles to its west. The men were hungry, not having eaten for half a day. This was enemy territory; Twur and Da-shwey told the militiamen to stay under cover until they investigated.

As the two walked through the fields toward the village, they came upon an old peasant and a youngster repairing a harrow. At the sight of the armed strangers, the peasants gathered their tools together and hastily began walking in the direction of the village.

"Don't go, old-timer," called Twur. "We want to speak to you."

The peasant pretended not to have heard and increased his pace. Twur ran and caught up with him.

"Don't be afraid," Twur said. "We're Ba Lu. We only want to ask where is your village administration office."

At the words "Ba Lu" the peasant and the boy stopped. "We don't have any such office," said the old man suspiciously.

"Is there someone who takes care of your village?" asked Twur patiently.

"Yes, but he's not home now. He's out working in the fields." The youngster and the peasant started to walk away.

"Why are you two in such a hurry to leave?" Twur was puzzled.

The old man mumbled something about going home for a mid-day nap. Da-shwey remembered that there was a progressive by the name of Lin who once had come to see him about underground activities in this village. He asked where Lin lived. After a long explanation by Da-shwey of why he wanted to see him and how they had met, the boy stopped frowning. He led Da-shwey and Twur to Lin's house.

Lin was eating when they arrived, but he dropped everything to greet them. "Have you had your lunch yet?" he asked warmly. "What are you doing here?"

"We'd like to know what the situation is in this village," said Da-shwey.

"Things are a lot easier. The enemy seldom comes now," Lin replied.

The boy laughed delightedly. "You really are Ba Lu! I thought you were lying to us!" He ran out of the compound at top speed.

"Do you think this village can manage a meal for 150 men?" Da-shwey asked.

"We can manage several meals!" laughed Lin. "No question about it!"

Twur and Da-shwey led the militia into the village. The youngster had already spread the word that the Ba Lu had come, and smiling peasants crowded around the men. Grinning from ear to ear, the formerly suspicious old peasant insisted that Da-shwey eat at his house.

"Aren't you afraid of us, uncle?" joked Twur.

"Eh, we don't fear the Ba Lu, it's the Japs and puppets we fear! They fooled us many times pretending to be Ba Lu. We're afraid to trust anyone now. Those little stinkbugs are very sneaky!"

Sentries were posted around the village and Lin introduced the militia to various peasants' homes. Every family brought out its best food, including white flour which had been hidden away. The people couldn't do enough for the fighters.

"We've been waiting for you to come for a long time," said the peasants.

"You're all so good," smiled the militiamen, "we'll try to be worthy!"

While they were finishing lunch, a messenger arrived with orders from county headquarters. The militia was now First Company, with Twur as its captain. Da-shwey was appointed first lieutenant and political commissar. By nightfall each company was to take its position around enemy strongholds circling the city and attack them. First Company's objective was the village of White Horse, guarded by a fortress full of puppets. Beside taking the fortress, the company was to cut off any enemy attempt to retreat from the city via White Horse. The watchword was — "Not one enemy shall escape!"

At dusk, the First Company reached White Horse, only two miles west of the city. The village had no wall but was on an island in the river which fed the Bayang Lake. A large stone bridge from the dyke was the sole land approach. The fortress stood opposite the island end of the bridge. Both the dyke and the river led directly west to Paoting, one of the largest cities in central Hopei province. Whoever held White Horse could control the land and water routes between Paoting and the city under attack.

The company was divided into three platoons of about 50 men each. The first platoon stationed in the houses on the dyke opposite White Horse, would control the bridge and the gate of the fortress. Another platoon went east along the dyke to a point mid-way between White Horse and the city to serve as a vanguard against enemies trying to escape from the city. The third platoon and the company command, camping a bit further west in a tiny hamlet on the river, prepared fifteen boats to meet any eventuality.

Every member of the company tied a white handkerchief around his arm as identification. The password was "Attack!" By the time all the posts were manned a light drizzle had begun to fall.

*

Able to relax for the first time in hours, Twur and Da-shwey, overcome by fatigue, rested in a little hut. Twur reclined on one elbow on the *kang*, his

pistol holster hanging from his neck. In an instant he was fast asleep, and rythmic snores came from his open mouth. Da-shwey sat on the other end of the *kang* with his back against the wall. Completely worn out, his eyes smarted painfully.

The drizzle changed to a steady downpour. Gusts of wind blowing in through rents in the paper window made the flame of the oil lamp waver and dance. Drowsily Da-shwey worried about Mey and the baby. How wonderful it would be when they all were together again!

Then it occurred to him that a tyrant like Ho might kill his prisoners before the city could be taken! Da-shwey sat bolt upright, his heart racing. What if he never saw them again! Sleep now out of the question, he listened to the rain pelting with increasing intensity. The paper windows were completely soaked. He lengthened the lamp wick and began to pace up and down the small room. His troubled mind turned to the men camping out in the open. Da-shwey shook the deeply sleeping Twur.

"It's raining very hard," he said, "and they're all new recruits. We'd better go to have a look."

"How will we go?" mumbled Twur, still dopey with sleep.

Da-shwey laughed. "Do you want me to call you a car? We'll walk, of course! This is the time to see how their spirit is!"

"Right!" said Twur, hopping off the *kang*. "Let's go!"

Each of them accompanied by a messenger, they set out to inspect the platoons. Twur went toward the men at the approach to the stone bridge; Da-shwey started out along the dyke.

In the pitch dark night, the rain cascaded with such fury that you could hardly keep your eyes open. Da-shwey and his messenger, on the top of the embankment, skidded and fell continuously in the slippery mud. Finally they took off their shoes and walked barefooted, but thorns and brambles made their progress a torture.

"Commissar, don't you think we'd better get out of the rain?" suggested the messenger hopefully. He was only fourteen years old.

"We're almost there," said Da-shwey. "I want to see if they're on the alert."

After they stumbled on a bit further, a voice suddenly rang out of the blackness.

"Password!"

"It's us!" squeaked the young messenger.

The sentry's bolt clicked. "Stand where you are! If you move I'll shoot!"

Da-shwey quickly gave the password; the sentry told them to advance. They found him, soaking wet, squatting beneath a date tree. He wore a broad conical straw hat and cradled his rifle close to his body to shelter it from the rain.

"Commissar! What are you doing here!" he cried, leaping to his feet as he recognized Da-shwey.

"I've come to see you fellows," grinned Da-shwey. "Does the rain bother you?"

"Ha!" said the sentry. "If you're not afraid of it, why should I mind?"

The sound of their voices brought Du the platoon leader sloshing through the mud. "Commissar!" he said, surprised. "Why have you come out in this storm?"

HSIAO CHUAN-CHIU: The Alliance of Workers and Peasants

"I was worried about the men," said Da-shwey. "It's been raining so hard and they've only just joined the militia."

"Why, they're feeling fine," laughed Du. "Their morale is excellent!"

"I want to see them," said Da-shwey.

Du led him to where the men were squatting along the slope of the dyke with their backs to the wind. A few yards further, facing the direction of the Jap-held city, two sentries were posted.

When Da-shwey approached, the militia all rose, protesting courteously against his coming out in such bad weather. Most of them were Party members; Da-shwey swelled with pride to find them so steady.

"You're really all right!" he commended them. "Aren't you bothered by the rain?"

"We're farmers," they chorused. "We like the rain!"

"It's good for us. It makes us grow!" said Du comically. The others laughed.

"The nice thing about rain," joked a militiaman, "is that when you're thirsty, you just open your mouth and there's your drink!"

"And when you make tea out of it, it has a 'heavenly' flavor!" punned Du.

With a wrench at his heart, Da-shwey thought how much Du resembled Shwang. He turned to serious business. "Be careful not to get sick," he urged the peasant soldiers. "You won't be able to do this job if you're ill."

"We're used to the rain," they assured him. "We'd have to have soft bones for a little shower like this to hurt us!"

"This is a very important post," he reminded them. "If enemy troops try to run to Paoting from the city, they must pass through here. Be especially careful at dawn not to fall asleep. In the first place you'll catch a chill and get sick. Secondly, that's when they're most likely to make their break. Now that the rain is stopping you should get up and walk — move around a bit."

"Don't worry about us," said one of the militiamen. "We know what to do; we'll be all right!"

As Da-shwey and the messenger started back, the men wanted to send an escort.

"That won't be necessary," laughed Da-shwey. "We'll find our way without any trouble."

*

When he reached his quarters, Da-shwey found Twur waiting for him impatiently.

"I thought you were never coming back!" Twur fumed. "Everything has gone wrong! Meng has taken his platoon, which is supposed to be guarding the bridge, and sneaked into White Horse with it!"

Da-shwey was furious. "But if the enemy blocks off the island end of the bridge our men won't be able to get out!"

"First he takes his platoon in, and now he comes back alone!" raged Twur. "Why didn't you say so in the first place! Get him in here!"

A militiaman was dispatched and a few minutes later he returned with Meng. The platoon leader's wet clothes were plastered to his body.

"What was the duty assigned to you?" snapped Da-shwey.

"To guard the bridge," said Meng sulkily.

"Then why did you lead your men into the village? And since you did, why have you come out without them?"

Meng stammered with agitation. "I — report! . . . Didn't you tell us to cut off the enemy? The men all said why don't we go into the village and circle the suckers tight? Cut them off from food and water and they'll be helpless! I — I — just didn't think of the terrain!"

"Brilliant!" moaned Twur, punching his thigh. "If the enemy seals off their end of the bridge who'll be the suckers then?"

"Mother's — ! That's right!" said Meng, disappointed.

"Well, what do you want to do?" demanded Twur.

Meng scratched his head. Then his face lit up. "Why not have them swim back?"

"How are they going to swim all that distance?" Twur yelled. "And their guns would be ruined! And what about the men who can't swim? You certainly fixed it beautifully!"

Speechless, Meng thumped his rifle butt on the earthen floor. He squatted morosely, hanging his head. There were several minutes of heavy silence. Finally Da-shwey spoke.

"Meng," he said, "go in again before dawn and find your men. You'll be responsible for any losses."

Twur waved his hand. "Go in at once and lead them out! If you can't do it, you needn't come back!"

"If it's daylight by the time you reach them," said Da-shwey quickly, "don't try it!"

Meng rose to his feet, nodded. He left without a word.

"We shouldn't give conflicting orders," said Da-shwey after the platoon leader had gone. "I told him to stay with his men; then you ordered him to bring them back. What if the enemy discovers them?"

"Say, that's right," said Twur regretfully. "It's almost dawn. What shall we do?"

"Let's wait. He may not get through."

As they talked, the window paper was turning greyish white. Then the stillness of the early morning air was shattered by rifle fire! Twur rushed outside and sent a man to investigate. Before long the man came running back, with Meng right behind him.

"If you order me to die, I'll go!" cried Meng, distracted. The tip of his conical straw hat was pierced through with a bullet hole. Angrily, he ripped the hat from his head and threw it on the *kang*.

"What happened? Report!" ordered Da-shwey.

"I was heading for the bridge when someone in the fortress turned his flashlight this way. It must have made my rifle barrel gleam because they really let me have a volley! Then I hid behind the dyke until the man you sent ordered me to come here. . . . I can't get to my platoon and they can't come out! What am I going to do?" groaned Meng.

"You tried anyhow. Don't worry, we'll think of something," Da-shwey consoled him. He turned to the pacing Twur. "We've got fifteen boats. Why don't we try to take the men off in some of them?"

Twur laughed and slapped himself on the forehead. "Of course! The very thing!"

"Let me take the boats," Meng pleaded.

"We'll all go together," grinned Twur.

A squad of militia was assigned to hold the approach to the bridge. If any shooting was heard, the squad was to fire on the fortress tower. Twur, Da-shwey, Meng and five other men each manned a boat. They quietly rowed to the back of the island and landed.

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In the small village, it didn't take long before they found the militia. The platoon was in peasants' houses opposite the fortress. Peepholes had already been cut through the walls of the dwellings.

The militiamen greeted their leaders with joyful surprise. "We're all ready," said the peasant soldiers. "When shall we start?"

"Take it easy," smiled Twur. "We'll try to talk them into surrender first!"

With Da-shwey and Meng, he came round to a house which was separated from the fortress only by a moat.

"Let me try," said Meng. He climbed up on a box and shouted through the window. "Hey! Puppet countrymen . . . "

A shot rang out and Meng fell to the ground in a heap. "Meng, Meng!" cried Twur. He and Da-shwey rushed to the platoon leader's side.

From the fortress, a volley of rifle bullets came pouring into the little window. Cursing, the militia platoon pumped a stream of lead at the tower. In accordance with the instructions it had received, at the sound of the shooting the squad at the mainland end of the bridge also opened fire.

With bullets whizzing all around, Meng opened his eyes and sat up. "What happened?"

Da-shwey looked him over in the light of the early morning sun, then sighed with relief. "You must have been hit with a chip from the wall. You've got a big bruise on your forehead."

"Mother's — !" grinned Meng. "Is that all!"

There was a lull in the firing. Twur stepped up on the box, careful to keep his head to the side of the window opening.

"Go on and shoot!" he bawled. "The Ba Lu is willing to fight you!"

"Comrades," called a man on the tower, "I just woke up. One of my squad leaders gave the order to fire without my knowledge. Please excuse us!"

The voice sounded very familiar to Da-shwey. At first he couldn't place it, but he soon discovered the speaker was Gwo. Gwo had only come to the fortress the day before with special orders from Ho, puppet garrison commander in the city. His business took longer than he expected; not daring to make the trip back after dark, he had remained overnight. Now he was caught in the Ba Lu encirclement.

Gwo had suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Ba Lu in recent years, and he had learned to fear and respect the people's soldiers. But he was a wily scoundrel; his tone revealed nothing as he courteously inquired, "What unit are you, comrades?"

"We're a company in the 24th Regiment," replied Twur.

"Please let us hear what you have to say!"

"Haven't you heard that the Japs surrendered?" demanded Twur. "We know that you puppets didn't sell your lives to the enemy willingly. Some of you had no other way to earn a living; others were forced into it. But now the Japs have given up. Who'll support you now? We're all Chinese — turn over your arms!"

"We know that the Japs surrendered," replied Gwo, behind the battlements, "and we're ready to give up our weapons. But Commander Ho has ordered us to give them only to Chiang Kai-shek! A soldier's first duty is to obey; I have no choice!"

"What does he mean — give his guns to Chiang Kai-shek!" growled the infuriated platoon. "Let's shoot the bastard!"

"Hold your fire!" yelled Twur. Again he shouted to the tower. "Why turn your arms over to Chiang Kai-shek? Haven't you seen anything in eight years fighting against the Japs? Which Chinese shed their blood and died for freedom? 'Shanker Jack' hid himself in a monastery in Szechuan! All he could do was to give orders to kill Communists; to fight the Ba Lu while he was making deals with the Japs! Do you want to give your guns to that kind of a reactionary son of a bitch?"

There was no answer from the tower.

"What about it?" roared Twur.

"Stand out in the open and talk, comrades," Gwo requested.

The militia leaders went into conference. They didn't want the puppets to think they were afraid, but they weren't anxious to be shot either.

"I guarantee you won't be fired on," called Gwo.

"And if you break your promise?" asked Da-shwey.

Gwo took his oath. "Then I'll be a bastard's grandson!"

Swinging wide the gate of the compound, Twur, Da-shwey and Meng stepped to the narrow strip of ground between the wall and the fortress moat.

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Looking up the tower, they could see Gwo's pock-marked face plainly as he rested his arms on the parapet of the tower roof. Since his hands were empty the cadres returned their Mausers to their holsters. Gwo hadn't seen Twur and Da-shwey since that day, eight years before, when he had come to Shenjya with his bandits to demand cake. The two Ba Lu were simple young yokels then. They had changed so in the intervening period that Gwo didn't recognize them.

"Comrades, what rank do you hold?" he asked, peering at their grey uniforms.

"This is our political commissar," said Twur, indicating Da-shwey. "I am a captain."

"Your name, please."

"I'm called Twur."

"I wasn't expecting you, Captain Twur. I can only offer you these," said Gwo, dropping a package of expensive cigarettes at their feet.

Meng picked up the cigarettes. With one expert heave, he threw the pack up on the roof. "Thanks very much", he said, "but we Ba Lu don't smoke that brand!"

Da-shwey explained at length why the puppet armies were finished, what the generous policy of the Ba Lu was toward prisoners. As he spoke, puppet soldiers crowded the parapet to listen.

"Well," demanded Twur impatiently when Da-shwey finished, "are you coming down or aren't you?"

Gwo assumed his most official manner. "Let me think it over," he said pompously. "I'll let you know this evening."

"You'll come right now if you're coming," said Da-shwey. "We have no time to wait!"

Blacky Tsay previously had sent Nyur to organize the women of the village. Now, with the girl at their head, the wives and mothers of nearly every puppet in White Horse approached the tower in a body. From the foot of the fortress the women shouted to their menfolk.

"Why don't you come down, son?" called the mother of a squad leader. "The Ba Lu have you surrounded, but they're acting very soft-hearted! Don't wait up there to die! Come on home!"

"How can you be so stupid!" a wife yelled to her husband. "Because of your job we've had the name of traitor for years! Now we have a chance to get rid of it for good, and you're still hesitating! Every time a shot was fired around here, your whole family's heart dropped for fear that you'd been killed! Do you want to be a puppet the rest of your life? If you don't come out, I'm going to kill myself right here before your eyes!"

Weeping, the women called to their men in the fortress; on the tower, the puppets were deeply moved. Nyur stepped forward to add her personal plea.

"We're all Chinese," she called in a clear voice, "and the Ba Lu doesn't want you to give your lives in vain. There are only two roads open — give up your arms and return to your loved ones, or face sure death for yourself and the stinking name of traitor for your children and grandchildren! Which will it be?"

The puppets hung their heads and sighed. A few wept openly. Several men, including the squad leader whose mother had shouted first, looked inquiringly at Gwo.

"What shall we do, commander?"

Gwo hesitated. His soldiers began whispering together. Below, the exhortations of the women and the Ba Lu never let up for an instant. Afraid of what might happen if he should be the only one to hold out against surrender, Gwo decided.

"We'll get our things together!" he shouted.

Suddenly, firing was heard on the dyke between White Horse and the city. Gwo's men, coming from the city to escort him back, had run into the militia platoon under Du. Gwo promptly changed his mind.

"Sorry, comrades!" he cried from the tower. "Troops are coming! We can't leave now!"

"Why can't you?" yelled the women and the Ba Lu. "Come down at once!"

Gwo pulled his head behind the parapet. "No, no!" he shouted. "I can't take the responsibility to . . ."

But he never had a chance to finish, for he was seized by several of his own men. They removed his gun, and bringing their own weapons, they ran down out of the fortress.

Then, on the dyke, Du's platoon successfully drove the enemy troops back to the city. Gwo and the puppets surrendered docilely.

That day, 1,000 militiamen captured all the enemy strongholds around the city. At dusk, the county command ordered First Company to proceed to the village of Big Stone, which had just been liberated. This village was also on the dyke, still closer to the target. From here the company was to join the attack, due to start the same night.

*

In Big Stone, after a fine spread given by the grateful peasants, the militiamen made inquiries about conditions in the city. An old man was found who had just returned from there. Da-shwey and Twur questioned him.

The puppets had exchanged their poor firearms for Jap .38 rifles, said the old man. Living like lords, they had set the Japs to work at the most menial tasks. Now, the puppets were preparing to try to escape to Paoting.

"How do you know?" asked Da-shwey.

In the Fu River, which is a short distance beyond the city's northern wall, explained the peasant, the puppets had moored four huge barges. "Besides, they're selling their grain, their furs — even their clothes! If that doesn't mean they're going, what does?" demanded the old-timer triumphantly.

Further inquiry revealed that the north gate was guarded by a small platoon which had no machine gun. At night, only one sentry was posted.

"Have you heard anything about a woman Ba Lu who was captured a while ago?"

"The one with the fat little baby?"

"That's right! That's right! What about her?' Da-shwey's heart pounded wildly.

"I heard that she was questioned the other day," said the old man, "but I don't know what happened after that."

Though sick with worry, Da-shwey refused to let himself think of Mey and the infant. He plunged into the task of helping Twur prepare the men for the coming attack.

Chapter XX

Victory — Autumn, 1945

The night was very dark, for the moon had not yet risen. In an open field, the First Company assembled for final instructions. The men were mostly young peasants who had just been recruited. They wore their ordinary working clothes. Although each of them had a cartridge belt slung across his chest and a rifle over his back, what gave them an air of uniformity was the confidence with which every man bore himself. They had proved their worth in battle and they already looked like soldiers.

Stiff as a ramrod, Twur stood before them. "In the performance of your duties, you comrades haven't slept in two nights," he said, waving his fist to punctuate his remarks. "Now we're going to finish off the Japs and traitors, and you have to fight again. Are you tired?"

"No!" roared one hundred and fifty throats.

"Good! In a few minutes we'll leave to blockade the city's north gate!"

Then Da-shwey addressed the men. "Comrades, tonight no one must smoke or cough. You're not even to speak except when it's absolutely necessary. The scouts must notice everything and investigate everything carefully. Only fire as a last resort. We don't want to give the movement of the company away. Comrades, final victory is in sight! Remember the rallying cry of Commander-in-chief Chu Teh — 'Courage, courage and more courage!' We must respond to his call, and fearless of death, firmly fulfil our responsibility!"

"We'll do our duty!" shouted the militiamen. On the order, they set out.

Groping its way through the darkness, the First Company climbed the dyke and slowly followed it eastward to the city. It was so still you could hear the river lapping against the side of the embankment, the splash of fish leaping out of the water.

When they came within sight of the enemy pillbox above the north gate, the militiamen concealed themselves in a small grove of trees. After receiving a few whispered instructions, a squad of eight men crept to the river bank outside the north wall. There, tied to a dock, were the four barges which the old man had mentioned. Working quickly and quietly so as not to disturb the boatmen sleeping on the craft, the squad untied the moorings. Gently, the steady current bore the barges off into the night.

Then the First Company moved forward to join the scouts. Dispersing its men among the handful of peasant houses scattered outside the gate, the militia settled down to enforce its blockade.

Fifteen companies surrounded the city that night. Aroused peasants from all the neighboring countryside also swarmed to help the Ba Lu. Some carried stretchers, some brought scaling ladders, others had picks and shovels — no one came empty-handed. Thousands stood poised for the attack which would annihilate the Japs and traitors. Excitement ran high, for the people had been waiting many years for this day!

*

Ever since the Japanese surrender, Ho had been faithfully carrying out Chiang Kai-shek's orders. He had withheld his arms from the Ba Lu and he was protecting the Japs. Although to impress the people he made a great show of guarding enemy prisoners, actually he still used the Japs in his fight against the Ba Lu.

But the situation had changed more quickly than he expected. Now he was surrounded in his city. As soon as he received the report that they were encircled, he hastened to see the Jap General Kamesaka.

Before a little bronze Buddha on the table in his room, Kamesaka had placed offerings of food, soup, dried fruits and pasteries. His body straight but his head bowed, the Jap mumbled rapid incantations. He was praying that

the gods spare his life and permit him to return to Japan. Not daring to interrupt, Ho stood at one side waiting for Kamesaka to finish. At last, very respectfully, the Jap bowed three times to the Buddha and his prayers were over. He asked Ho to be seated.

Kamesaka had lost weight; his high cheekbones stood out sharply in his thin face. Lately he had given up trimming his mustache, and he had a ragged look about him. Enormous quantities of beer were turning his eyes bloodshot.

When Ho told him the Communists had surrounded the city, it was as if he had been struck on the head with a mallet. The gas bag of his "Japanese Soul" was punctured, and from it his "Bushido Spirit" hissed out like a fart. Eyes staring and mouth agape, Kamesaka sat utterly speechless.

After he had recovered a little, the Jap asked Ho about the military strength of the puppet garrison. Ho said the defense works were strong; he estimated the city should be able to hold out for three days, at least. The Ba Lu had no heavy weapons and wouldn't try to storm right away. If Paoting would send relief, he had no doubt, Ho said, they could break out of the encirclement and escape.

The Jap sprang to his feet. "May the gods be willing!" he cried in a thin soprano. Kamesaka immediately dispatched an urgent telegram to Paoting.

Ho issued an order to his puppet troops to hold out — that relief was on the way. Returning to his quarters he told his concubine to pack their gold and jewelry. They had to be ready to leave as soon as the Japs from Paoting broke the siege.

Then he sought out Jinlung. Smoking one cigarette after another, Ho discussed the question of Mey with him.

*

Mey had already been questioned twice. The first time was the day after she was arrested. Ho had ordered that her wounds be dressed and that she be given a good meal. Then she was led to his parlor where he courteously invited her to be seated.

"Long ago, I heard what an intelligent, capable person you are, Mey", Ho had said with his most winning smile. "It's a great pity that a girl like you has gotten mixed up with those bandits. You know they can't last very long."

Holding the baby in her arms, Mey was sitting in a chair opposite, her body half turned away from Ho. She whirled and faced him, her big eyes blazing.

"You're not talking — you're farting!" she cried. "The Ba Lu is fighting the Japs and saving the country! The people all love the Ba Lu; who says it won't last! A filthy traitor like you! You plunder and murder the peasants! Every child who's old enough to speak, curses your name! How long will you last? When they catch you, the people will skin you alive — they'll tear you to pieces!"

Not angry in the least, Ho laughed indulgently. "You should be more far-sighted, Mey. Don't let the Communists bewitch you. They're cruel people to force a girl like you to do such dangerous work. It could end very tragically. You'd be much better off working for me. I can guarantee you'd have a fine future."

Mey looked at him levelly. "Don't talk rot," she said. "I volunteered for this job. The only thing that will make me happy is for all of you traitors

to be wiped off the earth! Now that I've fallen into your hands, the only future I have is an honorable death! When you decide to kill me — I'm ready!"

"But your poor little baby; won't it be a great pity for him if you should die?"

Grinding her teeth, with one motion Mey set the child down on the table. "No! I don't pity him! Kill me now and get it over with!"

The baby began to cry. Ho took the infant in his arms and tenderly patted him. "Don't be so hard-hearted, Mey! If I wanted you to die I only have to lift a finger. But I don't want you to make a useless sacrifice. There isn't enough gold to buy one living breath! I know it's hard for you to change immediately. I'll give you some more time to think it over. You probably realize I wouldn't be this patient with anybody else!"

He ordered that Mey and the baby be taken back to the cell.

Puppet soldiers who had been listening outside, sympathetically shook their heads. "She's really all right!" they said. Thereafter, they secretly went out of their way to make Mey as comfortable as they could.

A few days later, Ho sent for Mey again. Again he pretended to be very touched at the fate of her child if she should die. This time he was gratified to see her eyes glistening with moisture. But Mey angrily wiped her tears away.

"I'm crying only because I've failed to carry out my duty and fallen into your dirty hands!" she grated. "The child won't live long after my death. It would be better if you killed us together!"

Ho's face darkened. With a cold laugh he left the room. Almost immediately, three of his secret agents entered. They put the child to one side and threw Mey to the ground. The rough handling opened the wound in her shoulder; she fainted with pain.

A few minutes later she revived. Sobbing, she cursed the traitors bitterly. They took a thick board, placed it across her thighs and pressed down hard. Mey screamed in agony. But no matter how they tortured her, she refused to agree to Ho's demands. Finally they carried her to her cell, flung her in and locked the door.

*

Now that the city was surrounded by the Ba Lu, Ho and Jinlung decided that Mey must be killed. But they thought one more attempt should be made to force her to cooperate with them. For if she would capitulate, they might bring her to Paoting and use her to deal with the Ba Lu.

"Well, have you thought it over?" Ho asked when she was brought before him by a squad of puppets. "This is your last chance. You yourself shall decide whether you live or die!"

Mey turned pale, but she answered calmly. "Only by dying can I be faithful to the revolution!"

Ho ordered his men to remove the baby, but Mey held the child tightly to her bosom. "We'll die together!" she insisted firmly.

The siren at the city's south gate sounded and traitor troops began rushing to their posts. Breathless, Jinlung ran in and reported to Ho.

"They're staging a general attack! The situation is very tight! I'm afraid we can't hold the south gate — or the east! What do you want us to do?"

Ho's frozen countenance showed no emotion. "It's all right," he said tonelessly. Turning to the squad of puppets, with a wave of his hand he indicated that they should take Mey out and shoot her.

Mey laughed as they led her through the door. "Fine, fine!" she crowed. "You treacherous dogs are finished! I can die happy now!"

As the puppets marched her through the deserted streets, Mey could plainly hear the guns of her comrades around the city walls. Her whole body trembled; in a loud voice which shook with emotion she cried, "Down with Japanese imperialism! Down with the country-selling traitors! Long live the Communist Party! . . ."

Outside the south gate bugles blew and the militiamen poured their full fire power. A rain of hand grenades blasted the defenders off the wall. The puppets wavered and fought back listlessly for a few minutes. Then the south gate surrendered. The east gate quickly followed suite. The militiamen streamed into the city.

Most of the Japs were surrounded in a school. Several Japanese comrades, including Yoneda, who had joined the Japanese Anti-War League had come to work with the militia. Shouting to their countrymen in their own tongue, they pleaded with them to surrender. Within fifteen minutes, the Japs raised a white flag.

As soon as the defenses were breached, Ho banded together with Jinlung and Kamesaka. Escorted by a squad of puppets, two of whom carried tommy guns, they hurried toward the west wall. But the flames from the west gate already were reddening half the night sky. They changed their direction and fled north. At the north gate too, the militia had won control, but Ho decided they had to risk it. Preceded by the spitting tommy guns, the gang rushed through the open doors. The militia fell back before the hail of lead, then countered with a barrage of hand grenades. A ripping explosion sent puppet bodies flying through the air; the first tommy gunner dropped with half his head blown away. The puppets ran in all directions.

Ho shoved the remaining tommy gunner forward with the muzzle of his pistol. "Keep firing or I'll kill you!" he yelled.

Closely followed by Jinlung and Kamesaka, he dashed west and clambered up the dyke. Militia led by Twur and Da-shwey took after them in hot pursuit.

Before they had run very far, Ho and his henchmen were halted by a challenge ahead of them on the embankment. When they failed to answer, a volley of shots mowed down the tommy gunner. Kamesaka dropped his gun as a bullet tore into his right shoulder. Ho and Kamesaka stumbled down the dyke into the open fields. Jinlung was wounded in the leg, but he gritted his teeth and hobbled after them.

In the brightness of a full moon the pursuing militia never lost sight of their quarry. Gradually they closed in on the lagging Jinlung. A dozen men fired at once. The traitor's riddled corpse slumped limply to the ground.

Ho had lost his hat and one of his shoes; Kamesaka kept tripping over his long sword, but he couldn't stop to unfasten it. They had been hoping to disappear into the fields of tall *kaoliang*. But they hadn't reached them and they were too exhausted to run any further. So they dropped where they were — in a large bean patch — and burrowed themselves under the vines. A minute later the militia arrived. Da-shwey ordered the men to spread out and search.

When he saw Da-shwey approaching him, Ho quickly raised his pistol and fired. The bullet whizzed by Da-shwey into Twur's abdomen. Twur staggered

and Da-shwey rushed to support him. His intestines oozing out of his gaping wound, Twur glared at his comrade with burning eyes.

"What are you bothering about me for," he said angrily. "Wipe out the enemy!"

Another shot whistled past Da-shwey's head and he fired at the burst of flame. His bullet shatterd Ho's pistol. Seeing that the traitor was now unarmed, Da-shwey rushed to take him alive. Kamesaka, crouching almost directly beneath his feet, took Da-shwey completely by surprise. Using his left hand, the Jap raised his big sword and slashed deep into Da-shwey's leg. As Da-shwey fell, dropping his gun, Kamesaka whirled his blade in a glancing blow on the Ba Lu's head. Leaping to his feet, Da-shwey lunged at the Jap and tore the sword from his hand. With delirious rage he hacked Kamesaka to oblivion.

The other militiamen had found Ho and finished him with a rain of lead. They ran to hold up Da-shwey who was swaying weakly, his face covered with blood.

From all sides the peasants closed in on the scene of carnage. Discovering the bodies of Ho and Kamesaka, their years of simmering fury and hatred boiled over. With rifle butts, knives, picks and shovels, yelling and cursing, the peasants smashed the bodies to a jelly of bloody mud. . . .

*

By the time Da-shwey recovered consciousness, he had been carried to a room in the city. A hushed circle of militiamen and peasants watched a doctor bandaging the three inch gash on Da-shwey's forehead. Just as the doctor finished dressing the wound, Nyur came in leading Mey and the baby!

The puppets who were supposed to execute her had led her to the courtyard of a big temple. They fired three shots into the air, then concealed her until they came over to the Ba Lu.

Mey's face was white. She supported herself with a stick in her right hand; her left hand was around Nyur's neck. Due to the torture she had suffered, she walked with difficulty. The comrades hastily separated to let her through.

She glowed with happiness when she saw Da-shwey and tears welled to her eyes. "Da-shwey!" Mey sobbed. "I never thought . . . I'd see you again in this life!"

Da-shwey struggled to a sitting position. Half his face was covered with bandage; he stared at her with one eye. His throat contracted so tight that for a moment he couldn't speak. But there was joy in his heart, and a triumphant smile spread across his countenance.

"Mey!" he laughed, taking her hand. "We saw it through! We've won!"

Mey wiped her eyes. "Blacky is right when he says we bought this victory with our blood! I just saw Twur . . . Ai! We sacrificed so many men!"

"Twur died an honorable death!" said Da-shwey in a voice choked with emotion. "Just before he died he told us to wipe out the enemy! We must remember his words well! We've won the War of Resistance, but the reactionaries still haven't been overthrown. Our job isn't finished until they are!"

"And we will finish them too!" said Mey with conviction. "If we could suffer through so many years of struggle, there's nothing we need to fear!"

"Under the leadership of Chairman Mao, we defeated the Japs," cried Nyur, "and with him we'll win every victory!"

Da-shwey stretched forth trembling hands and took his baby in his arms. Tenderly he kissed the infant's little face. "What does it matter if we suffer a bit?" he smiled. "When the revolution succeeds, our children can enjoy a happy life!"

Blacky Tsay arrived, beaming. He waved his arm vigorously. "I've good news!" he shouted. "We've been victorious on every front! In all, thirteen cities in the province have fallen to the Ba Lu!"

Cheers and wild applause greeted his announcement. In the street, firecrackers cracked and popped and cymbals rang. The joyous roar of many voices came nearer and nearer.

"It's the peasants celebrating the victory!" yelled Nyur. "Let's go and join them!" She ran from the room, followed by skipping laughing youngsters. . . .

And at daylight a bright red flag proudly floated above the city battlements.

Li Chi:
Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-Hsiang

I

In 1930 it was when
A sad thing happened in San Pien.
San Pien's treasures all men knew,
Its poor were many, its rich were few.
On every side stretched yellow sand,
But all of it was rich men's land.
In '29 there'd been a drought
When all the farms were quite scorched out;
As blind men grope in the dark with fear
Poor devils dread a barren year.
In its tail not its head, lies Famine's sting,
So all feared 1930's spring.
Weeds gone they searched for leaves and roots,
Not a sign to be seen of young green shoots;
Though March's dead in coffins lay,
No burial had those who died in May.
The grain in the barns was rotting away,
No end to the grain of Mr. Tsui.
Like homeless dogs were the starving poor,
Tsui would not aid their suffering sore.
A gale makes big trees break into song;

Tsui had money and was made *pao chang* *.
Abacus beads are ninety-one,
Counting Tsui's livestock you'd never get done.
Ten miles' pasture, seven miles' sand,
Each herd of cattle carried his brand.
Smoke from a chimney flies up high,
Tsui owned even half the sky.
Then the magistrate's word was law,
He could make wind blow, make rain pour,
The colder it gets the fiercer it blows,
The richer a man the harder he grows.
That year no crops were harvested,
The peasants' hearts were filled with dread;
Now lack of grain starvation meant,
And how could they pay Tsui his rent?
A man can always tighten his belt,
But arrears in rent disaster spelt!
Old Wang had gone hungry many a day,
But Tsui's bailiff came to force him to pay.
His tongue wagged quickly in his head,
As Wang said all that could be said:
"There's always my life, though I can't pay now,
In my next life I'll be his ox or cow."
"You're behind with money, with grain, with rent,
D'you think with your life we'll be content?"
Each sentence followed by an angry glare,
At each third sentence his whip cracked the air.
The bailiff seemed by a devil possessed,
Old Pock-marked Wang was sorely pressed.
Blood from his body poured like rain,
And he called for his mother in his pain.
A lonely swan on the sand will fall,
His neighbours grieved for him one and all.
"You wear fur in winter when winds are strong,
It won't kill you to get no rent from Wang;
You've taken all my possessions away,
You may beat me to death, but I still can't pay!"
The ass has no foresight who knocks down his hay,
And a bailiff has no heart they say.
When one stick was broken another he'd start,

* Head of a hundred families in one or more villages.

To see the blood flow would about break your heart.
At sunset he was not quite gone,
But a dead corpse the moon shone on.
Pulling up weeds you must get out the root,
In all his doings Tsui was a brute;
The old man dead he took the son,
Of all the family left not one!
No plants will grow in the winter cold,
Men ranked lower than beasts in the China of old.

Pock-marked Wang's son, named Wang Kuei,
Was about thirteen when they took him away.
Mr. Tsui hit on an excellent plan;
He could always make use of a working man.
The son, though his father he couldn't be,
Was a labourer whose toil was free.
A kid bleats when it's left alone,
Wang Kuei though young had ideas of his own.
Cattle work hard but at least they're fed,
Wang Kuei always went hungry to bed.
When New Year dainties filled the pan
Wang Kuei still munched his hunk of bran.
In winter warm clothes he had none,
In June wore skins when the cold was done.
In autumn he gathered in crops from the land,
Cursed for his slowness though raw was his hand.
In winter when he herded goats
He had no thick clothes, no warm coats.
Blood poured from his chapped hands and feet,
His food was frozen too hard to eat.
He wanted to light a fire in his camp,
But the wood in the snow was all too damp.
At the time when the aster in autumn appears
Wang Kuei had worked for exactly four years.
Wheat grows well after a winter of snow;
Like young wheat he seemed to grow.
In the depth of winter, when it snows like mad,
Wang Kuei started thinking of his dad.
A dead ox'es place by a younger ox is filled,
A son must avenge a father killed.

Skylark eggs the skylarks lay,
Tsui's home was in Dead Goat Bay.
In flood foul water will mix with clear,
Rich families and poor lived here.
Beside a stream in Dead Goat Bay
There lived a poor man, Li Te-jui.
He was fifty-eight and his beard was white,
In one flow'r of his home he took delight,
His daughter Hsiang-hsiang, the joy of his life,
For sons he had none, and dead was his wife.
Like a moulting sparrow in winter's sleet,
No clothes to wear, no food to eat,
Hsiang-hsiang at sixteen toiled hard all day,
But tired to death went hungry alway.
In a rough cloth sugar may be rolled,
A poor girl may have a heart of gold.
Fresh round grains on maize you find,
Li was old but his heart was kind.
He would take Wang's hand and say with tears:
"You've had a hard life of it all these years!
Though young of troubles you've had your share,
An orphan left without parents' care.
Beggars may sleep within temple doors,
You may count this home of mine as yours."
When wind and storm drive all men home,
To chop them wood Wang Kuei would come.
With a younger sister and a dad
A home this homeless youngster had.

Red wild lilies are fair to view,
Goodly to look at Hsiang-hsiang grew.
Her big black eyes, a limpid pair,
With dewdrops on the grass compare.
Rice must be husked again and again,
Hsiang-hsiang always loved peasants plain.
The hillside willow grows green and gay,
A proper youngster was Wang Kuei.
Nigh six feet tall, and all of it brawn,
A match for two peasants he was born.
Maize will flower when it's half grown,
He'd always wanted Hsiang-hsiang for his own.

Hard to start singing though the song is sweet,
Hard to grow cherries though they're good to eat.
Their hearts were given each to each,
But both were shy and slow in speech.
He drove goats up the mountain high,
She looked for herbs in the glen nearby.
Wang Kuei sang as he drove his goats along,
And this was the burden of his song:
"After a hard day a fellow sleepless lies,
Thinking of Small Sister he can't close his eyes."
Halting his steps he waits in silence mute,
From the glen comes a sound soft as a lute:
"Wild lilies bloom in the meadows here,
What you have in your heart, say without fear."
"By the roadside mushrooms grow,
None's your equal, that I know!"
"Choosing a horse, one is better than another,
Choosing a man, who's as good as Elder Brother!"
"Teeth like rice, lips cherry red,
Your sweet words go to my head.
Marry a rich man and live in luxury,
Why should you suffer with a poor man like me?"
"Light from the stove shines half the bed o'er,
Measure rice in wine-cups still I won't think you poor.
I've loved peasants since I could speak or see,
Better than silver are truth and honesty."
"A green-skinned melon has seeds that are red,
I shall remember all my Sister has said."
"Tangled as flax is all I want to say,
We must meet to bare our hearts another day."
"When the world is sleeping, then,
In your room we'll speak again."
"There'll be many stars but no moon in the sky,
Don't trip over the dog when you come by!"

The sun was sinking bright and red
As to the well our Hsiang-hsiang sped.
The rope scarce reached the water below,
And Hsiang-hsiang panted as she bent low.
In black jacket and silk shoes arrayed,
Mr. Tsui comes down the glade.

Like a potato is his head,
Foxy eyes narrow as a thread,
A wide grin discloses his yellow fangs,
And he touches Hsiang-hsiang as over her he hangs.
"Let me help if it is too much for you,
To spoil those pretty hands will never do."
"Mind what you're doing, Mr. Tsui.
Take your clumsy hands away!"
"Proud little baggage, you'd better go slow,
I took a fancy to you long ago.
Mutton soup and the best white rice,
Long ago I thought you nice.
You can live in comfort if you marry Mr. Tsui,
Food, clothes, jewels — anything you say."
Angry and ashamed was Hsiang-hsiang then,
Carrying her bucket she started home again.
Mr. Tsui follows fast behind,
Gropes in his belt two dollars to find.
"Two silver dollars I'll give to you,
To make yourself a pretty dress or two."
Hsiang-hsiang had always been a little wild,
And hated the rich since she was a child,
First because her own home hungry went,
While all their grain was given Mr. Tsui for rent;
Next because Wang Kuei was treated like a slave,
Working night and day no rest did he have.
Red like the pomegranate floods her cheeks o'er:
"What do I want your filthy money for!"
"You damn slave girl, be careful what you say,
You can't afford to offend Mr. Tsui!"
Cringing like a beaten dog away she went,
But Tsui's rage had not found sufficient vent:
"When the rope breaks then down falls the pail;
You will fall into my hands without fail.
To eat coarse food you throw white flour away,
You won't have me but you will have Wang Kuei?
Wang Kuei's young but he is poor,
I may be old but I've money galore.

Flour for the bin goes through a sieve,
Only if I wish it can Wang Kuei live.
A smoking chimney makes the rafters black,
I shall make him suffer two days when I go back!"

II

No trees and few stones had San Pien,
The peasants' lot was bitter then.
No clouds above, below a drought,
They had to think of some way out.
The party and people well get along,
Shensi's Communists began to grow strong.
First Old Liu, then Kao Kang came,
Till half a province the Red Flag could claim.
From a spark in the hay a big fire can spread,
Soon as the Red Flag appeared the poor turned red.
Thunder's heard and lightning seen for miles around,
Quick as thought Communism covered the ground.
Willingly his plough a red ox draws,
And all people welcome a good cause.
Still common peasants in broad daylight
They take guns to storm the garrison at night.
When the forts are opened they divide the grain,
Land, sheep, cattle are all disposed of then.
The Youth Corps and the Red Guard so keen
Consist of youngsters of eighteen or nineteen.
Women on the road like a gust of wind,
Their long hair cut in a bob behind.
The lower stream is muddied when the upper stream runs high,
Wang Kuei joined the Red Guard secretly.
Leading his cattle to the marsh when it was light,
To revolutionary meetings he went at night.
Staying at the meeting until the cock crowed,
Then to hurry miles back along the homeward road.
During the day his goats he had to keep,
During the night not a wink of sleep.
But he was strong with an iron constitution,
All his heart set on revolution.

The fingers of one hand are not the same length,
And Wang Kuei's longing surpassed the rest in strength.
Other people's hatred was like a mountain high,
But Wang Kuei's hatred was higher than the sky.
Tsui had had his father beaten till he died,
And now he wished to steal Wang Kuei's bride!
Five years like a beast he'd toiled away,
Not paid a single cent by Mr. Tsui.
Nothing was too crooked for Mr. Tsui to do,
He built forts, bought horses, hired soldiers too.
The landlords and gentry were vicious every one,
But Mr. Tsui had the rest outdone!
Peasants felt his flesh they'd like to bite,
Even the dogs barked at his sight.
To the guerrillas the people used to say,
"Hurry up and capture Dead Goat Bay."
Though beans are still raw hungry people can't wait;
They fixed the twenty-third of December as the date.
At midnight they would arrest Mr. Tsui,
At dawn troops would enter Dead Goat Bay.
When the plan was made they all felt stirred,
Only two more days to the twenty-third.

When a fox is hunted the rabbits run away,
News of revolution struck fear in Mr. Tsui.
He dared not sleep either early or late,
As if one wall could stop the River's spate.
Openly and on the sly he investigated
To find out who were with the Communists related.
When he heard Wang Kuei was working underground
Mr. Tsui's heart with rage began to pound!
When Wang left his flock and came inside,
With two thick ropes of hemp he was tied.
He was bound tightly again and again,
And hung suspended from the rafter then.
The outcry of all the villagers was great
When they saw the revolutionary's fate!
Two red willow canes on his back were broken,
When he fainted with cold water he was awoken.

Burning oil a bright light is made,
Wang Kuei's skin from his body was flayed.
Tied by two ropes from thigh to throat,
Trussed like a duck in a pond to float.
All his face and body with blood overlaid,
Like an ox that's living flayed.
Mr. Tsui seemed with rage about to choke,
And shouted at him between each stroke:
"Dirty frogs want to feed on crane.
You poor scum hope for great happenings in vain.
Look at yourself in some dirty water, do,
What great deeds can be done by dogs like you?
Can snow fall in mid-July?
Can the sun rise in the western sky?"
"No need, old dog, to put such airs on,
We'll have your life before three days are gone!
What does death matter in my case,
Millions of others will take my place!"
"Wang Kuei, don't talk so recklessly;
You and I are the same family.
What injustice to you have I ever done,
Bringing up a foundling like my own son.
You tear down the bridge once the river is crossed,
Your feathers grown, your gratitude is lost.
A horse without blemish may be a dragon yet,
Are you so stupid this fact to forget?
Precious as gold the wastrel who repents,
A butcher may become a god if he relents.
Still to forgive all your faults I'm ready,
Well I know young men are unsteady."
"No use, old turtle, your turning sweet,
Soft or hard you'll find me hard to cheat;
In all the world's no greater knave,
You killed my dad, made me a slave.
All the year round like a beast I worked away,
For five years I haven't had a cent of pay.
Cattle eat hay at the dead of night,
But you called me up, old dog, out of spite;
I've had no clothes, no bedding in the cold,
In these five years only two sheepskins old.

With the best rice and flour you had good cheer,
While I ate coarse grain at New Year.
A glare always followed what you had to say,
And I got the whip every other day;
You had parents to care for you,
D'you think I didn't have a mother too?
If you're human so am I,
How can you so lack charity?
I may be poor, but clearly I can see,
I can make decisions in what concerns me.
If we succeed my position will be strong,
While if we don't try I shan't live long.
Long as they live fleas jump with all their might,
I've but one life to risk, whatever my plight.
Kill me or skin me as you feel inclined,
Well I know your devilish mind.
When hard measures fail, kindness you try,
Hoping to work on my sympathy.
You'd better abandon your devilish scheme,
To make me your slave is harder than you dream."
Tsui, like a mad dog in his anger's heat,
Claws his own face and jumps three feet.
"Dirty dog, beneath contempt, utterly perverse,
When you're spoken kindly to you only curse!"
Once more the whip poured down blows like rain,
And Wang Kuei gritted his teeth with pain.
A gust of wind, a gust of sand,
Hsiang-hsiang felt it was more than she could stand!
She trembled wretchedly, weak in every limb,
Tortured by the blows that fell on him!
Her face turned white and then turned red,
Tears gathered in her eyes that she dared not shed.
Her head was swimming, numb her body grown,
Like a living creature turned to stone.
To save her lover she hit upon a plan,
And out of the front gate secretly she ran,
All the time thinking on her way:
"Wang Kuei's life depends upon today.
Often to Liu's village he used to repair,
There surely must be guerrillas there.

Quickly with this message I must fly,
If I am too late my lover may die!"

Loud on his whistle the sergeant blew.
To fetch rifles, mount horses, everyone flew.
When they heard of Wang Kuei's cruel punishment,
In the third watch at night this order was sent:
"A loyal comrade and true is Wang Kuei,
His life must at no cost be thrown away!"
A troop of twenty horsemen rode before,
Followed by the Red Guard and Youth Corps.
Clearly the sound of horse hooves rung,
Over their shoulders their rifles were slung.
The steeds were strong, keen the men to fight,
Their shots rang out before the day was light.
Only one root has the turnip white,
Peasants and guerrillas for the cause unite.
When they heard firing the struggle begun,
Some took a stick or chopper, some a shot-gun.
Inside and outside they worked with resolution,
So Dead Goat Bay had its day of revolution.
Shots sounded, dogs barked madly, roosters crowed,
As into Dead Goat Bay the guerrillas rode.
Mr. Tsui was sleeping soundly in his bed,
Hearing the shooting up he leapt in dread,
Having worked off his anger by beating Wang Kuei,
With a pipe of opium he felt quite gay.
The copper lamp with its glass shade by him,
And silver-plated pipe did not satisfy him.
He'd two or three wives, both old and young, there,
But none of them could with Hsiang-hsiang compare!
In a dog's jaws fat mutton sometimes lands,
Still he could not get her into his hands.
"This will be the death of Wang Kuei, the swine,
And then Hsiang-hsiang will become mine."
Sweeter than brown sugar the prospect appeared,
His saliva trickled down to wet his beard.
So he dreamt, the opium lamp beside him placed,
How in his arms Hsiang-hsiang he embraced.
Not for long however did this sweet dream last,

For shot after shot rang out so fast.
He was startled from his sleep at the first shot,
Down from his bed at the second he got.
Quickly to his thugs directions he cried:
"Bar the gate, and hurry up to get inside!
Wherever they come from, shoot if you can,
Ten silver dollars I'll give each man!"
Still more men came, shot followed shot,
A better solution Mr. Ts'ui got.
Before the sun had risen that day
Through the back gate he slipped away.
When the bright sun on high did ride
The Red Flag was planted on the hillside.
Like a bright blossom blazed the sun,
Guerrillas and peasants were as one.
"Thick rice gruel, bubbling with its heat,
Ready for our guerrillas to eat."
Wang Kuei was saved, his ropes untied,
At sight of him the guerrillas cried.
Wang Kuei lay senseless for the pain,
While Hsiang-hsiang called 'Brother!' again and again!
"If you die, heartbroken I shall be,
Open your eyes and look at me!"

Red is the earth beneath the sun's blaze,
For Revolution has brought better days.
In the time of Mr. Tsui everything looked black,
Nine households out of ten used food and clothes to lack.
When the poor revolted they drove away Tsui,
And Dead Goat Bay became Live Goat Bay.
When a lamp lacks oil it cannot burn bright,
Peasants without land are like an unreplenished light.
Once given land a bright light they spread,
Everybody's face with joy looks red.
Like eating sweet things after bitter that day
When Hsiang-hsiang was married to Wang Kuei.
Both men and women are equal and free,
Free marriage is the fashion in the new society.

Like the poor pilgrim in his progress of old,
They had both suffered hardships untold.
Through a thousand troubles they did not despair,
Sweet it is to see such a well-tried pair.
Like the bird chirping as to its nest it flies
Tears on her wedding night poured from Hsiang-hsiang's eyes.
Water from a fountain flows forever down,
With her tears she wet Wang Kuei's new gown.
"All night I waited to hear the cock crow,
I nearly went crazy, the days seemed so slow."
Hsiang-hsiang wants both to laugh and cry,
She can't speak, for she feels too shy.
Wang Kuei, smiling, remains tongue-tied,
Looking at Hsiang-hsiang thinks only of his bride!
Tightly he clutches Hsiang-hsiang's hands,
Hard to speak, hard to smile, speechless he stands.
"By the Revolution the rich we overthrew,
Without the Revolution I could not have married you!
It was the Revolution that saved you and me,
That gave all us peasants our liberty.
We must all determine the Red Flag to defend,
If it falls we shall come to a bitter end.
Quickly let horses fly, oxen drive the plough,
To spread Revolution is our duty now."
"The earth is slippery under heavy rain,
If we fall it's for us to rise again,
High above the sun shines bright and red,
The Revolution I resolve to spread."
When their home was settled and three days spent,
To register his name as a guerrilla he went.
On his head he wrapped a cloth to keep off the sun,
And over his shoulder carried a gun.
Ev'ry week or fortnight, when he was free,
He would ask leave to go home Hsiang-hsiang to see.
When he had seen her he would return again,
She would see him off in the valley then.

III

After fine weather it may rain like mad,
The news a messenger brought was bad.
He didn't pause to draw breath on the track,
The White Army of oppression was coming back!
Guerrilla troops sped to the foe's rear that night,
Everyone was ordered as guerrilla to fight.
When the whistle blew each man shouldered his gun,
Wang Kuei had no time to Hsiang-hsiang to run.
The news came at night to Dead Goat Bay,
And White troops entered at dawn the next day.
The face of each White soldier was black and grim,
As if two hundred dollars' pay was owed to him.
They searched the houses left and right, and everywhere said:
"Which family sent a man to be a Red?
Which families were given cows and sheep,
Which were apportioned property to keep?"
Niu Sze Wa had been given a cave,
That was discovered by the questioning knave.
Mr. Tsui's gateway was tall and wide,
With two hemp ropes she was tied.
With scourges of nettle and of thorn
All her back was whipped and torn.
That White sergeant was no better than a beast,
He clenched his fists and his lips he creased:
"Water can't be drawn from a well that's dry,
To get easy riches you wretches try!
The King of Hell decreed that you should be poor,
Still by hook or crook some change you struggle for.
The Reds are strong because on you they rely,
Scum! Do you think you can move Mount T'ai?
What you took must be surrendered with all speed,
Your Red Army's nothing but a broken reed!"
Ropes to bind the people and knives to hack!
Mr. Tsui's property was soon given back.
Soon the wolf followed where his dogs led the way,
Such was Mr. Tsui's return to Dead Goat Bay.
Long gown, short jacket, walking cane,
Loathsome as ever did Mr. Tsui remain.

From one house to another he would go:
"It's vain for you to hope for my money, you know.
Men of old revolted in earlier ages too,
There's nothing rare about such an ado.
Strange things pass on earth, just as in the sky,
How else can the Heav'nly Dog eat the moon on high?*
In it goes at one side, and then out again,
Brightly as ever the moon shines then,
Always the righteous people come out on top,
Soon the devilish troublemakers have to stop.
Who's the real ruler here who holds sway?
Tsui is the ruler of Dead Goat Bay!"
Nature is hard to change, dogs in filth delight,
Tsui coveted Hsiang-hsiang with all his might.
When Li Te-jui to the front had been sent,
Then to her home Mr. Tsui went.
All his ugly teeth in a grin showed he:
"Well, Little Hsiang-hsiang, I'm back, you see.
I will forgive all the past, I vow,
If you will just come home with me now.
Your Red Army husband has run away too,
Poor grass widow, I'm sorry for you.
Don't be headstrong; throw in your lot with me,
Food and clothing will be yours to live merrily."
Angry yet shy, Hsiang-hsiang felt dismay,
Hanging her head not a word did she say.
Taking her silence to mean consent,
Tsui fell at once in a wild ferment.
The room was empty, so he was bold;
Straightway of Hsiang-hsiang he took hold.
Taking advantage, he kissed her outright,
Trying to force her in broad daylight.
Wild with rage Hsiang-hsiang tried to get out,
Giving as she ran a piercing shout.
With a broad smile he barred the way.
"Women really are fools," said Mr. Tsui.
As he spoke forward he stepped a pace,
But Hsiang-hsiang spit right in his face,

* According to Chinese mythology the eclipse of the moon is caused by the "Heav'nly Dog", which takes the moon for a meat ball.

She kicked with her feet and clawed at his head,
She scratched Mr. Tsui till both cheeks bled.
All the neighbours came to watch the fun,
And turning tail Mr. Tsui had to run.
But as he was leaving to Hsiang-hsiang he said:
"Just look at all the trouble you've made.
I tell you openly, mark what I say,
You may like it or not, but you'll have to obey!"

Mr. Tsui's heart was truly black,
Li went to the front and never came back.
The old bird dead, the male bird flown,
How could Hsiang-hsiang manage on her own?
To join the guerrillas was all her thought,
But Tsui's men watched her, and she was caught.
First rice then flour to her they'd cart,
Mr. Tsui thought this way to win her heart.
This one was asked and that one waylaid her,
Two or three times in one day to persuade her.
The fierce to threaten, the kind to persuade,
But faithful at heart Hsiang-hsiang stayed.
Each day she cried, and cried so often
That hearts of stone would have to soften.
If one is happy one will not cry,
Her handkerchief with tears was never dry.
This handkerchief was half a yard wide,
She'd start to cry again once her tears dried.
Behind the house was rising ground,
Outside the fort the sandhills wound.
Some hills were high and some were low,
But to find her lover she could not go.
An elm was planted the house nearby,
Its roots were thick, it was not high;
Grasping it hard she shook the tree:
"Oh, tell me where can my husband be."
By the window watching the wild geese southward fly,
Hsiang-hsiang felt there was no end to her misery.
Folk say that wild geese can carry letters over.
"Won't you take a message now to my lover?"
Trees were just sprouting when you went away,

Now the leaves have fallen, but far from home you stay.
If a horse refuses to budge then the whip is heard,
If unable to come home, just send a word.
Like piles of bricks and piles of stone,
To you my sorrows are unknown.
Clouds by a gust of wind are scattered,
Our marriage was by others shattered.
Peas are rounder than any other grain,
Of men none are sadder than we twain!
No other crops are smoother than wheat,
So many troubles no others could meet.
Thinking of you now from my food I turn,
The fire in my heart makes both lips burn.
Rice grows within the shade, wheat in the sun,
Thinking of you my eyes over-run.
I took up my rice but to you my thoughts stole,
And tears fell down into the rice bowl.
Lonely in the evening my lamp I do not light,
Late at night I think of you, before the day is bright.
Longing for you I can't sleep all the night through,
On the bedside tracing a portrait of you.
I call you to save me, Brother, with all speed.
My life, if you delay, will be hard indeed.
If I should die, you must never rue,
Dead or alive to you I've been true.
Tall horses have short stirrups and long rein,
My spirit follows you, but in vain."
The best intentions Mrs. Liu had,
She came to see Hsiang-hsiang because she was sad.
When she was free to advise her she'd go:
"Poor little thing, don't take on so!
Some day the guerrillas will come back again,
Public and private scores will all be settled then.
They'll take him alive and tie up Mr. Tsui,
The White Army running dogs will all be swept away!"
Thirty grains of barley ninety edges show,
Hsiang-hsiang fell ill so great was her woe.
After a spell of drought parched is the farm,
Yellow and thin Hsiang-hsiang lost her charm.

During her illness some cloth shoes she made,
Gave them with tears to her neighbour and prayed:
"Mrs. Liu! To you these shoes I entrust,
When I'm dead give them to Wang Kuei you must.
Tell him from me when you take this pair,
These are the last shoes of mine he'll wear."

Wild with rage was Mr. Tsui:
"The damn slave won't do as I say."
No tiger or wolf was in evil so apt,
Most wickly then he had Hsiang-hsiang kidnapped.
He prepared for his guests a banquet in state,
December the twenty-first was to be the date.
Tsui's running dogs' activities increased,
Only officers came to the feast.
To each private soldier fifty cents gave he,
They played finger games and gambled merrily.
Hsiang-hsiang wept as if in tears she'd melt,
The more she thought of Wang Kuei the sadder she felt.
Into a red silk coat, green trousers of brocade,
Two or three women forced the poor maid.
As she cried she cursed away:
"Why not marry your mother, you devil Tsui!
The day will come when my wish I gain,
And by my knife you will be slain!"
Pretending not to hear a word she said,
Mr. Tsui smoked opium lying on the bed.
When he'd smoked enough he went Hsiang-hsiang to see,
While all the guests like dogs followed merrily.
They all offered their congratulations,
As if they were Mr. Tsui's relations.
Laughingly entered Mr. Tsui:
"Sorry that the food is so poor today;
In marrying this concubine
I have to rely on all friends of mine.
I would have told her your drinks to pour
And all your trouble to thank you for,
But obstinate still she is crying away,
I will have her to drink with you some other day.

This girl was born with a vulgar taste,
Not liking the rich but peasants debased.
However hard poor Wang Kuei tries,
Can an arm compare with a thigh in size?
This wedding of mine was fixed by heav'n's decree,
Try as she might she could not escape from me.
All our sheep inside a fold we keep,
How can a turtle turn into a sheep?
When all's said and done this thought should be stressed:
'Can the sun rise in the west?' "
The gate had no guard as they drank inside,
And stealthily in the guerrillas did ride!
When shots heard, 'Kill!' came the shout,
Our guerrillas are back to fight it out!
A horse and a gun to each man belong,
Truly our guerrillas are strong!
Armed with rifle, sword and spear,
Shot-gun and pistol they appear.
What soldier wanted war in all the army White?
They gave up their guns without a fight.
Fire on the whole place a bright light shed,
And to welcome them all the peasants sped.
The feasting officers were all appalled,
Under the bed in fear Tsui quickly crawled.
Captains were caught while the sergeants did run,
And tied up firmly one by one.
Mr. Tsui turned quite soft inside,
Trussed in a bundle he was tied.
The sergeants tried to run away,
But in the guerrillas hands fell they.
Hsiang-hsiang laughed when she heard the guns crack:
"It's our guerrillas who've come back."
Happiness can make people strong,
Down from the bed she jumped headlong.
Fast she walked, and impatiently:
"Let me see my lover, where is he?"
Leave from his captain Wang Kuei sought,
And came to look for her inside the court.
"All the court's lighted with a bright glare,

But I can't see Little Sister anywhere there!"
Only in the distance a bride could be seen,
In a red jacket and trousers of green.
A horse won't forget the road however long the way,
And Hsiang-hsiang had not forgotten Wang Kuei.
A handkerchief round his throat had he:
"If that isn't Brother, who else can it be?"
Now the two meet and hand clasps hand,
Hard to speak, hard to smile, speechless they stand.
All the thoughts in their hearts can't be expressed,
As if a handkerchief on their mouths were pressed.
Only much later Wang Kuei the silence breaks,
"If we support the Revolution, it's for our own sakes. . . ."

BLAST FURNACE

by LU CHI

It was Tsao's first day on the job at the iron smelting works, in July, 1948, in the Northeast.

"Where are you from?" old Yutou, the foreman, asked him.

"I just got away from Changchun," said Tsao. Changchun then was still in the hands of the Kuomintang reactionaries.

"What made you come here?"

"I heard that workers were well off in the liberated areas." Tsao was a little annoyed at all these questions. A man did his job and drew his pay and that should be the end of it.

But the sixty-year-old foreman wasn't through yet. Looking the newcomer over, he demanded, "Have you done this kind of work before?"

He doesn't think much of me, mused Tsao. The hell with him. Aloud, he said briefly, "I've played around at it a couple of days."

The old man pushed the bifocals up on his nose and blinked a couple of times. "All right," he said carelessly. "You can help Wang over there carry firebricks."

So that's all I'm good for! Tsao fumed inwardly. Fine! I'll be watching to see what's so wonderful about the way this plant is run! . . . He glanced at the blast furnace, snorted, and went off with Wang.

From the whining blower a steady stream of hot air hissed through the main into the bustle pipe and then through four branch pipes called "tuyères" into the furnace. Two men stood on a top platform, feeding the open maw of the furnace with coke and iron ore. At the base, Sun, another workman, from time to time opened a small door where a tuyère entered

the furnace, and with a crowbar poked at the slag solidifying at the opening. When the slag proved to be massed too hard for his efforts, he would call young Li who would pound the end of the crowbar with a sledge hammer until the obstruction was broken up. Then, with long pincers, Li would remove the coke blackened by the air-blast, piece by piece. Sun was responsible for all four tuyère openings and was forced to keep circling the furnace continuously. Floating on the surface of the liquid iron gathering in the base of the furnace was slag which, theoretically, should have flown out when tapped through an opening provided for that purpose. However, this seldom happened, and young Li would have to reach into the fiery tap hole with a long metal instrument to skim the slag out slowly and laboriously, while he roasted in perspiration.

Each time he returned with a load of firebricks, Tsao watched these proceedings in wonder. Finally he turned to Wang and asked, "Have you always worked the furnace this way?"

"What's wrong with this way!"

"Why do you use pincers to take coke from the tuyère openings?"

"That's the way we've done it in the three years I've been here; Foreman Yutou says that's how the Japs used to do it. The coke is no good. The fire isn't hot enough to stop slag from hardening at the tuyère openings."

Tsao thought a moment. "How much iron do you get per kilo of coke?" he asked.

"About four kilos," said Wang.

"How come so little?"

"That's all we've ever gotten."

As they talked, the two walked toward the coke heap. Tsao picked up a piece and examined it.

"Is this what you're using?"

Wang nodded. Tsao tossed the coke back on the heap. "With this coke you ought to smelt more than four kilos of iron," he said. "There must be something wrong with the furnace."

"Do you understand this business?" asked Wang, surprised.

Tsao laughed. "I've spent a couple of days at it."

"Old Yutou has run this furnace for over twenty years. What could you learn in a couple of days! Don't kid me!" Wang took it for granted that Tsao was joking and the latter said nothing further.

But a few minutes later, when the liquid iron was tapped, Tsao couldn't resist standing by and watching. The molten metal flowed out of the furnace into ladles. Workmen carried these ladles to the foundry-room where the fiery contents were spilled into sand molds. Jang, an old timer, stood grinning with a dab of clay on a long pole, ready to seal the tap hole again when the iron stopped flowing. The flow was very slow, and the workmen who carried the ladles had to wait a long time until their receptacles were filled.

Tsao was sure now that the furnace wasn't right. He stepped forward and opened a tuyère cover. As he peered inside, Foreman Yutou came up to him.

"What are you doing? snapped the old man.

"Looking."

"Nobody told you to look. Get back to your firebricks."

Tsao slammed the cover with a clang and strode angrily away.

Glaring after his back, the foreman growled to Sun, "What a fresh kid! Is he trying to get tough with me? I've got a son older than him!"

*

The next day, the furnace refused to smelt. They added coke, stepped up the blowing engine, but to no avail. The plant manager came down several times, the union leader kept worriedly circling the blast furnace, beads of perspiration stood out on old Yutou's forehead. . . . And why shouldn't they be upset? Every plant and organization in new China had production schedules to meet. If they couldn't smelt iron, they'd be complete failures.

In the course of a frantically busy morning, the best they could coax from the "Old Sow" was only six "pigs" (two hundred kilos each). The strain seemed to make the astigmatic eyes of old Yutou more blurred than ever. As he polished the lenses of his bifocals for the hundredth time, he shook his head discouragedly.

"It's no use," he said to the plant manager. "We started on the new load of coke this morning and it's too sticky. It won't make iron."

That was serious. There was no time to order other coke, for the earliest possible delivery they could hope for would be ten days to half a month. Such a lengthy stoppage of production would result in a considerable loss. Frowning, the plant manager departed with the union leader.

Jang threw aside his clay dabbing pole and sat down hopelessly beside young Li. "You're always swearing at the 'Old Sow', because she shits too slow," he said mournfully. "Now she won't even eat."

"This is no time to be funny," said Li. "What are we going to do if the furnace breaks down?"

A pall of gloom settled on everyone as the blower was turned off. Red molten metal no longer danced and bubbled in the furnace crucible. . . . Tsao picked up a piece of the new coke and scrutinized it carefully from every angle for a long time. Finally, he could contain himself no longer.

"Who says you can't make iron with this coke?" he asked half aloud.

The old foreman overheard Tsao, and thought the younger man was ridiculing him. He became very angry. Jumping to his feet, he shouted, "If you can make iron with it, I'll turn my foreman's job over to you!"

The outburst took Tsao completely by surprise. He hadn't liked Yutou from the beginning and now the man was attacking him. He flung the piece of coke to the ground. "What do I want your foreman's job for?" he retorted. "I'm not competing with you. We're not smelting any iron and I only wanted to help. If you don't believe me, forget it!" Tsao angrily walked away.

"Never mind the boasting," the old man yelled after him. "The stage is yours if you want to sing!"

Tsao made no reply, but stalked off into the foundry-room. When he was out of earshot, Sun, the compressed air man, criticized the foreman sharply.

"What's the idea of blowing up?" Sun demanded. "Maybe he knows something. The way things are, anybody who has an idea ought to be allowed to try it."

Yutou's full mustache bristled indignantly. "That kid's still wet behind the ears! I just can't see him!"

There was no talking to the old man when he got into one of his stubborn moods, and Sun didn't try. But he had been impressed with Tsao's manner. The man had seemed to know what he was talking about. Sun went to look for him. When he reached the entrance of the foundry-room, he ran into Wang, who had been Tsao's partner in carrying firebricks. Wang told him of the remarks Tsao had made the previous day about their smelting process. The two of them conferred for a few minutes, then entered the foundry-room together.

They found Tsao seated at the base of a machine. Deep in thought, he was staring absently at the black sand in the molding boxes. Sun approached him.

"Tsao, old fellow . . . "

The young man raised his head and gazed at them silently. Wang and Sun sat themselves down beside him.

"You think there's something wrong with our blast furnace, don't you?" Sun began.

Tsao had the same kind of hard pig-headedness as the foreman, and moreover he was still angry. His answer was surly. "There's nothing wrong with it."

"Then why doesn't it make iron?"

Tsao laughed coldly. "The coke's no good," he replied sarcastically. "Didn't the foreman just say so?"

"Ah, come on, Tsao, don't sulk. The plant belongs to us. Can you stand by and see the furnace stop?"

"I don't know what you mean — 'The plant belongs to us' . . . !" replied Tsao impatiently. "Don't tell me that story!"

"But Tsao, I'm sure you're a good mechanic and understand . . . " Wang anxiously interposed, but before he could finish what he wanted to say, Tsao stood up and cut him short.

"I don't understand anything," he said flatly, and left them.

*

Tsao was seated disconsolately in his room when the plant manager and union leader entered.

The plant manager gave him a warm smile. "What do you think of our plant, Tsao?"

"Not bad," said Tsao briefly.

"Are you satisfied with your work?" asked the union leader. "I hear you had an argument with old man Yutou."

What are they up to? thought Tsao, a little frightened. Do they want to punish me? Or maybe have me up for public criticism. They say they do that around here at the drop of a hat. "I didn't argue with him," he denied hastily.

The union leader laughed. "Yutou is a stubborn old cuss. He's hard to convince, but if you can prove to him that he's wrong he behaves like a lamb."

Why were these men being so nice and friendly? Tsao thought of the officials in Kuomintang factories — vicious, nasty, always scowling. But these fellows . . . Tsao couldn't figure it out.

"Tsao," said the plant manager, "I understand you've had some experience with blast furnaces. What are you waiting for? We need help right now."

"I don't know much," said Tsao evasively.

The union leader came directly to the point. "Our furnace has stopped. If you've got a way to fix it, let's give it a try. The plant belongs to all of us."

The sincerity and intimacy with which these men treated him made Tsao too embarrassed to continue his pose of ignorance. "I have worked with blast furnaces," he admitted, "but I'm afraid . . ." He paused uncertainly.

"What are you afraid of?" demanded the union leader. "What's on your mind?"

"I can't fix the furnace alone, I need men to help me," said Tsao. "If any of them were against me — if they didn't spread the ore or coke on evenly, or mixed in something that didn't belong — they could make me fail . . ."

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that," laughed the plant manager. "There's nobody like that around here. Everyone will help you."

"We're with you," said the union leader, clapping him on the back. "Go ahead and fix it!"

*

His head propped by his hands, Yutou, the old foreman, gloomily sat on a pile of firebricks. From the foundry-room, he could hear the endless rumbling of the crane, but here, beside the blast furnace, all was silent. Sick at heart, he raised his head and stared at the cold hulk. Could anything be done? Probably not. According to his own experience, when the coke was no good, neither god nor demon could get iron out of the furnace. He'd just have to wait for the decision of the plant manager.

Just then, the manager appeared. With him were Tsao and the union leader. Yutou jumped to his feet.

"What are we going to do?" he anxiously inquired.

"We've been trying to get you new coke, but we still can't get delivery before two weeks," said the plant manager. "Maybe there's something wrong with the furnace. Let Tsao take a look."

Yutou was thunderstruck. "Who says it's the fault of the furnace?" he demanded angrily. "It's the coke that's no good. I've run this furnace for twenty years. Do you mean to say I don't understand a thing like this!"

"We can't always rely on old methods," replied the plant manager. "If they don't work, we all have to try to think of a new way to get iron out of this furnace again as quickly as possible. It would be much better if you set your mind to the problem instead of losing your temper so often."

The workers laughed and the union leader said, "Go ahead, Tsao."

Although irritated by Yutou's words, Tsao said nothing. Instead he uncovered one of the tuyère openings and looked closely. It was here he suspected that the fault lay. He recalled how Sun was kept busy clearing the slag from these openings with a crowbar. Then, when he examined the place where the molten iron was tapped, he began to get the picture. He pondered for a few minutes, then addressed the union leader.

"The main trouble is with the tuyère openings," he said definitely.

"How do you know?"

"The openings are too big, and they're straight. Because the air doesn't blow down to the bed of the embers, the fire below isn't hot. That makes the iron smelt slowly and the slag become hard. The bigness of openings lets air blow on the nearby slag and coke and turn them black. Coming in straight and flat, the air makes the embers in the middle burn hotter, but most of it just blows against the opposite wall of the furnace. That's why the iron flows so slow."

This was the first time in his twenty years' experience that Yutou had ever heard this idea. The molten iron always flowed slowly. What could this infant do to change it? It had been the same way when the Japs were here. The more he thought, the surer he was that Tsao was talking nonsense. Yutou couldn't suppress a snort.

But to the plant manager the theory sounded reasonable. Though he himself didn't know much about technique, Tsao seemed to him to know his business. He nodded and asked, "How can you correct it?"

"If I change the tuyère openings, it should be all right."

"Good! When can you start?"

"Right now."

The union leader looked at his watch. "Isn't it too late today?" he asked Tsao. "It's near quitting time."

"That doesn't matter. We'll fix it tonight, then tomorrow we can fire up and try it out."

"Tsao, you're really all right!" approved the union leader happily. "What kind of material will you need?"

Looking at the group surrounding him, Tsao said slowly, "I don't need any special material but I'd like to have two men to help me."

"Who can help Tsao repair the furnace tonight?" the union leader asked the workers.

Sun promptly stepped forward and spoke to Tsao, "Will I do?"

Young Wang was right behind him. "Count me in."

"That's fine," said Tsao, very pleased. "The three of us can do it."

Li, the young pincers man, strode over from the side lines. "Tsao," he pleaded, "can't you take one more?"

"Of course," laughed Tsao. "There's always room for one more on a hard job."

Yutou and Jang, the tap hole caulker, stood by without uttering a sound, but the old foreman's thick mustache bristled like an angry pouter pigeon.

*

Tsao and his three helpers began to work after dinner. It was past midnight by the time they had remade the tuyère openings.

"Now they're smaller, and angled down," said Tsao. "The air-blast will hit the embers on the bottom, then reflect up again. That will give us a hot fire and smelt the iron quickly. Because the openings are smaller, the air won't blacken the outside of the coke. . . ."

While this sounded reasonable, the men still were non-commital. As he washed his hands, Sun said, "We'll see tomorrow."

Tsao stretched his back and confided, "To tell you the truth, I've been working with furnaces since I was sixteen. That's more than ten years and I've stumbled on a lot of tricks. This coke will burn fine, now that we've changed the openings."

After they finished washing up, Tsao gave the repairs a final check. "They'll do," he announced. "Now let's get some sleep."

"Tomorrow we don't want any more nonsense out of you," said young Li, shaking his finger at the furnace, "you Old Sow!"

*

The next day, the plant manager, the union leader and several section chiefs all gathered around the furnace for the testing. Everyone was under a strain as they examined and questioned. Old man Yutou said nothing, but he had a sceptical air of "Show me!"

"How much iron will you try to smelt per kilo of coke?" Sun asked Tsao.

"We'll try for eight kilos, first," replied Tsao, after a brief deliberation.

Sun was startled. "Eight kilos!" he demanded incredulously. "It can't be done. Even when we had good coke, we could only smelt five, at best. I think you shouldn't aim so high on the first test."

"Let's try it," said Tsao confidently.

Who does he think he's kidding? old Yutou angrily said to himself. This is going to be some show!

A few of the men thought it was possible; most of them were not so sure. "Can you do it?" asked the plant manager rather anxiously.

"We'll do it," replied Tsao firmly.

"Come on then," said the union leader cheerfully, infected by his confidence. "I'll measure the ore."

The furnace was loaded, the fire was lit, and before long the blower was turned on. Its whining vibrations seemed to rack the heart of every tensely watching man. Sun was especially nervous. If they failed today, they'd really be in fix!

High on the loading platform, the men began dumping coke and ore into the blackened mouth of the top of the furnace. Old Jang thrust his pole into the tap hole from which the liquid iron would flow and was answered by wicked tongues of roaring flame.

Tsao watched the tuyère openings. After poking once or twice with a crowbar at the coke near their openings, he closed the inspection ports and stood by, silent. In spite of his faith in his method, he couldn't help feeling a little worried.

He made no move for so long that Sun became upset. "Don't you want to check the air openings again?" hinted the older man.

"Not yet," said Tsao.

Sun was really afraid of this procedure. In the past if you hadn't cleared the tuyère openings by now, they'd be clogged solid with slag.

Several minutes later, Tsao at last uncovered a tuyère opening, prodded a few times with his crowbar, then closed the little door.

"Shall we take the blackened coke out with pincers?" asked Sun.

"No, that's not necessary. I just stirred them a bit so that they'll sink down and burn."

Yutou, the old foreman, couldn't understand these goings-on. If you don't keep clearing the air openings and you don't remove the unburned coke, how are you going to prevent it from blocking the air pipes?

"She's spilling iron!" yelled young Li. He was the first to notice the molten metal beginning to pour from the tap hole.

Hastily, old Jang sealed it with a dab of clay. That's strange, he thought. She sure smelts fast today.

Then from the loading platform came the announcement: "She's smelted five 'pigs'!"

In all the years of Yutou's experience, the furnace had never produced iron so quickly. The grinning men burst into cheers. Young Wang rushed into the foundry-room, yelling for them to carry the ladles. Li capered and patted the sides of blast furnace, "This time you're all right!" he commended affectionately.

Fixing his bifocals firmly on his nose, the old foreman uncovered a tuyère opening and peered into the furnace. There was no blocking slag; only around the very edges of the glowing embers was some of the coke slightly blackened.

At the end of the morning shift, the union leader descended from the loading platform and announced the results so far: They had produced three and a half tons of iron at a ratio of eight kilos of iron for one kilo of coke, or an average of one and one-fifth tons per hour. Previously they were only able to get five kilos of iron for one of coke, or eight hundred kilos per hour. And if the furnace smelted more than five tons in a day she would begin slowing down.

Sun looked as if he was going to cry with happiness. "Tsao, old man," he said, embracing him, "you've done a great thing for our plant!"

"We're all working for our own family," replied Tsao with a smile. "That's the way it should be."

Seated glumly by himself, Yutou was torn by conflicting emotions. Although he was glad that the furnace was smelting again, he felt that his stubborn refusal to listen to Tsao had made him completely lose face. And even worse, he thought miserably, my twenty years' experience are worth nothing!

Observing his woebegone air, the plant manager approached him. His words combined criticism and encouragement. "You've been with this furnace a long time and you've gained a great deal of experience. But you rely on that experience too closely; you refuse to move from it one iota. You saw what happened here today? You must accept new ideas and study everything new. It just won't do any more to cling blindly to the old ways!"

*

That night Tsao and Sun and a couple of other workers made some further modifications of the tuyère openings. As a result, the following morning they were able to smelt 10.7 kilos of iron per kilo of coke. Although the furnace produced one ton eight hundred kilos per hour, or seven tons per day, it did not get red hot. There was no necessity to scrape out the slag, as it flowed out easily once the tap hole was opened.

According to the calculations of the plant manager, they could now not only smelt two more tons of iron per day than before, but they saved the labor of four workers and five hundred and twenty kilos of coke, worth over $280,000 in Northeast currency.

A meeting, held in Tsao's honor, was attended by the entire plant. The men were urged to emulate him and make bold innovations. Although our plant is small and lacks the up-to-date equipment of the factories in the big cities, said one of the speakers, as long as we all put our minds to our problems, our production record should be quite respectable.

Tsao was presented with a bonus of $ 300,000.

The same evening, Tsao spent a third of his money on peanuts and sunflower seeds and gave a party for all the blast furnace workers. Embarrassed by his generosity, they chipped in and bought candy which they presented as their token of congratulations. The union leader and Yutou, the old foreman, were also invited, but the latter persistently refused to appear.

"I can't do anything with him," said Li. "He's playing as hard to get as a young girl."

Tsao thought a moment, and then said, "I'll go to get him. The old timer just has to come!" And sure enough, he returned, smiling, a few minutes later, with Yutou.

The foreman's face was red with embarrassment and he laughed self-consciously. "To tell the truth, I really have no right to be here," he said.

"Then do you give in this time?" asked the union leader, as he politely led the old man to a seat.

"I give in!"

Grabbing a fistful of candy, Tsao placed it in Yutou's hand. "Please eat," he entreated. "Young fellows like me are too quick on the trigger. I hope you'll forgive our mistakes, because we'll be studying under you for a long time."

"Aiya, don't say that," replied the old man hastily. "I'm the one who should be blamed."

"The fault was mine, too," Tsao insisted. "When I first came, I had words with you because I felt you didn't think much of me. When I saw what was wrong with the furnace, I didn't make a sound, but just stood around and laughed." He turned toward the union leader. "I still was mixed up then. I wanted to earn my pay and that's all. But I'm straightened out now — this place belongs to us, the workers, and we're all one family."

There was complete silence, as Tsao paused. Then, he continued, "Though I understand this much, it's still not enough. I want to learn more. If everyone hadn't helped, I couldn't have fixed the furnace. We're all in the same family . . . and I hope the old foreman isn't angry with me!" And Tsao gave Yutou a deep respectful bow.

"Here, here! What are you doing?" protested the old man, flustered, quickly returning several obeisances.

Everyone laughed, and the strained atmosphere melted away.

At work the next morning, the men smiled with satisfaction at the sound of molten metal bubbling merrily in the repaired furnace. And they went about their tasks with the added competence of their strengthened comradeship and unity.

AT SIX A. M.

by LIU PAI-YU

It was the beginning of the rainy season in South China. Our troops marching towards the last provincial border in pursuit of the enemy, had gone without sleep for two whole days. Now, at nightfall, they were compelled to encamp in the rain.

After the battle two days before, Battalion Commander Shen Kuei-liang had given up his raincoat to cover a wounded orderly before he was carried away. Now, he threw a piece of green oilcloth across his shoulders and set about supervising the pitching of the camp. He helped the soldiers to choose suitable spots, shouted at the loafers who were trying to catch some sleep under the big trees, and directed the digging of ditches, and the setting up of oilcloth shelters for the night.

"Look how easy it is to fight in the South — all we need is a rifle and a piece of oilcloth," he said cheerfully to the commander of the First Company, his face dripping with water the while. The company commander who kept wiping his dripping face grumbled: "That's all very well, I'd sooner be sitting in a Western-style house any day." This Northerner simply could not get used to the continuous rain and endlessly plodding with his bare feet through the mud.

"What! Comrade Chen Ming-ho, weren't you the one to complain about the boredom of life in the city?" Chen knew from the tone that his superior had taken him seriously, so he saluted, turned away and splashed off through the mud.

Shen Kuei-liang watched him go. He knew that Chen carried in his vest pocket a Medal for Bravery wrapped in a sheet of the Northeast Daily News.

Chen was the type of soldier who could not bear inactivity and complained incessantly, but became quite a different person once there was any fighting to be done, a fact to which his battle-scarred body bore ample witness. "But there's something wrong with his outlook all the same," thought Shen to himself.

The whole battalion had settled down. Shen made his round and then crept into his oilcloth shelter. The orderly lighted a small pile of wood to dry his clothes, while Shen took a book out of his haversack and began reading beside the fire. The orderly who had just been transferred to this job knew nothing of the habits of his superior. "You haven't slept a wink for two whole days," he ventured. Shen smiled and turned again to his book. It was a book on auxiliary service at the front, written for the Red Army of the Soviet Union. He had carried it with him for more than ten days, snatching odd moments to read a few pages, and stuffing it into his pocket when the guns began to rattle. Now he thought he could finish it before they went into action again.

But the orderly was a talkative fellow. "Commander," he said, "I found just the right place for your battalion headquarters, but those people from divisional headquarters threw us out."

"Why?" asked Shen in some astonishment.

"Well, the chief of the 4th Section said they couldn't find any house for the divisional headquarters. But if the division needs an office, why shouldn't the battalion have one too?"

"Comrade, how do you suppose we can go on fighting if the divisional headquarters has no place to set up a radio and hang its maps? You musn't be so touchy, comrade. Sometimes we have to put up our headquarters in a trench, and we still manage somehow."

Just then someone was heard splashing about outside. The meddlesome orderly stuck out his head and called: "Who's there!"

The shadow stopped and a voice asked, "Who's in there?"

"The battalion commander," answered the orderly self-importantly.

Shen, recognising the voice of the divisional commander, jumped to his feet, saying, "This is the headquarters of the First Battalion." Then he hurried out.

The divisional commander greeted him cheerfully: "Ah, it's you, Comrade Shen Kuei-liang? So you've set up your headquarters in the open air? It looks as though we've cut in on your territory — it's too bad of us, isn't it?" he finished up jocularly.

The relationship between the two of them was not simply that of subordinate and superior. Shen had saved the life of the divisional commander during the battle for Szepingkai in the summer of 1947, and later on the divisional commander in his turn had helped Shen out of a tangle.

It happened before the final attack on Szepingkai in 1948, when the city was liberated for good. Shen was arguing with the regimental commander, and obstinately refusing to take over the artillery unit which had been assigned to his command. He maintained it would be more of a liability than an asset in the attack. If it were deployed too far from the frontline he could not command it; if too close he would run the risk of losing it, and he was not prepared to take the responsibility. The regimental commander was furious and criticised him for his "backwardness" and "conservatism". Shen obstinately remained squatting on the ground, puffing at his cigarette. At this moment the divisional commander arrived on the scene. He was slight of build, wore a dark mustache and had kindly, though penetrating eyes. In every action he was wont to walk along the frontline all by himself, now fast, now slow, but never stopping to take shelter, and yet he was never hit. When he heard a shell whizzing overhead, he would look up, listen attentively and then go on his way. By his calmness he inspired his men with courage, and if he found anyone lacking courage, or showing signs of fear during an engagement, he would take him along on his round, curing him for good of his fears. He was loved by everyone under his command; the men would say no one could claim to be a good soldier until he had learned to move like the divisional commander.

Now he said: "Commander of the First Battalion, bring up your artillery unit. I'm going with you." As they walked along, he went on, "During the war of Resistance, we had to rely on mines and tunnels, to fight the Japanese from behind their lines. We had a hard time of it, didn't we?"

"Certainly it was hard," replied Shen.

"How many times haven't you heard the men say, and you must have said it yourself: — If only we could give them a dose of shellfire!' Now that you've got your artillery, why don't you give them hell? Are you afraid the enemy will capture our guns?

You're not afraid to expose yourself to their gunfire — how can you stand by and watch your comrades being mowed down by American-made shells?"

He personally helped Shen to fix positions for the artillery and heavy machine guns, to give assignments, organise the system of cross-fire and to fix the signals for contact. The victory of that battle resulted in the capture of Szepingkai.

When the fighting was over and Shen Kuei-liang was busy collecting the trophies of war, he ran into the divisional commander who greeted him with:

"Well, did you lose your artillery?" Shen stood at attention, his face turning red: The divisional commander smilingly patted his shoulder and said: "The trouble with you is your backward outlook. It will make you lag behind the others. It's dangerous, and you can't serve the Party that way."

After that admonition Shen began seriously on his study of politics and military tactics, and as a result he became the most distinguished battalion commander of the regiment, an expert in directing the co-ordination of infantry and artillery. He would tell others that it was the divisional commander who had got him out of his troubles.

Now the divisional commander excitedly caught hold of Shen's hand and said: "Come and hear what's happening," and pulled him along.

They went into a small shed. This was the headquarters, crammed with radio sets, medical supplies, electrical equipment, and so jammed with people that they squeezed themselves in with difficulty. The divisional commander dragged Shen to the table where he saw the political commissar, the chief of staff and some civilians with their children, probably the owners of the thatched hut. Everyone was listening attentively to the thunderous noise issuing from the American-made radio — which the divisional commander insisted on calling his "food-box". Shen could not make out whether it was singing or shouting. He looked inquiringly at the divisional commander who only shook his finger and pointed to the radio. Presently he could make out that it was the sound of cheering. Suddenly above the sound of cheering voices, came a loud and vigorous voice greeting the cheering masses with "Hurrah comrades! Hurrah comrades!" The political commissar exclaimed, "It's Chairman Mao!" And then the sound of cheering

again drowned everything else. The commissar who had taken part in the political struggles of 1946 as a member of the "Mediation Committee", seized Shen's hand and cried, "The People's Republic of China has just been proclaimed! We have won at last!"

"Commissar," said the divisional commander, "where are the American members of your Committee? Let them listen! Where are the shells of Truman brand, eh?"

Shen listened on until he heard Chairman Mao finally say: "Comrades, you've had a long day. The meeting is over."

Outside, it had stopped raining, and the sky was studded with stars.

As he went out, Shen saw the commander pacing up and down again in the mud. He had been so absorbed in listening to the broadcast that he had not seen him leave. As he seemed deep in thought Shen decided to go by quietly, back to his own quarters, but suddenly the commander wheeled and said to him: "Commander of the First Battalion, do you realise what our victory means?" Shen was completely taken aback, he had been so overjoyed and excited by the broadcast that his mind was empty of all other thoughts. He stood there dumbly. "You must think about it, comrade, try and realise what it really means."

Just then the chief of staff called: "305! (the divisional commander's nickname), 305, a report has just come in." The commander turned and went quickly back to the shed, leaving Shen standing there.

When Shen got back to his oilcloth shelter, the fire had gone out. He lay down for a few minutes, but he was too excited and restless to sleep. He jumped up and went out to look for someone to talk to. All the men, however, were asleep, so back he went again. If only the political instructor who had been wounded, could be there with him. He lay in the dark thinking of him, smiling to himself at the thought of his youthful fat smiling face. He was a capable cadre, but he had his faults, and like Shen could not bear inactivity and regularly twice a month he sent a request to his superior to transfer him from his political job to a military post. Finally the regimental commissar simply did not even open his repeated requests. Gradually his attitude changed and as a result of his influence, in the spring of 1948 the battalion won not only the title of Combat Heroes' Battalion but also that of Model Political Battalion.

While he was lying there thinking a light flashed into the shelter. It was the orderly, calling him to a meeting.

The situation at the front was changing. The original plan had been to cross the provincial frontier the next day; but after two days of hard going over the muddy terrain in pursuit of the enemy, the divisional commander had decided to rest his men before the next engagement. There was a river before the frontier and the enemy was in control of the bridge. The Intelligence report which had just come in said that there was a large-scale movement on the enemy side and it looked as if they might be preparing to destroy the bridge. The divisional commander decided that they should not wait for instructions from army headquarters, but that the battalion on the spot should immediately be sent out to take the bridge. Shen's instructions were to try and take the bridge by six o'clock the next morning.

Twenty minutes later the whole battalion, who by this time had also been told the momentous news of the inauguration of the Central People's Government, was on the move along the pitch-dark mountain paths.

As he marched along Shen turned over in his mind the strengths and weaknesses of his battalion. He was confident of the will of his men to beat the enemy. But were there any new problems? He remembered at the beginning of the counter-offensive in the Northeast how he had to fight against certain rural trends which wanted to destroy the cities instead of preserving them. He had overcome this attitude. And now? A fortnight ago the battalion had been on garrison duty in a town of over one hundred thousand people. Had they become soft? He remembered the company commander grumbling "I'd sooner be sitting in a Western-style house any day" — an attitude like that might spread. Had not the divisional commander said, in winding up his speech on municipal garrison work: "Comrades, it isn't easy to hold fast to the proletarian standpoint while sitting in a comfortable sofa. Now that victory has been gained, we shall have to run many cities, and we must be guided by proletarian principles. To each of us victory also brings a serious ideological test." Shen's thoughts ran on, "So that's what he meant when he asked me, 'Do you know what this victory really means?' "

He turned to look for the commander of the First Company. "Old Chen!" he called through the darkness. "Here, Commander,"

replied Chen, and Shen saw him coming through the dark loaded with four or five rifles that he was carrying to relieve his men.

"Your burden is too heavy. Give me one or two of the rifles. Don't forget you've got to lead your men into battle today."

"But today is different from any other day — with our people's state established I feel I could carry a dozen rifles and think nothing of it. And shoot them all at the same time!" exclaimed Chen. "Do you remember, Commander, when we first evacuated Szepingkai?"

"Yes, it was in 1946 — you cried when we were ordered to retreat."

"A revolutionary soldier sheds blood, not tears. That day I shed tears, but it wasn't for nothing."

"It can never be in vain. Old Chen, I sort of took you wrong today!"

"I know, I said something that displeased you," said Chen.

"It doesn't matter if I was displeased. The point is, it is a problem of one's outlook."

"A Western-style house is better than camping in the open, don't you think it's true, Commander? But I never possessed a Western-style house of my own, not even a pigsty — Szepingkai wasn't bad. . . . It was, yes, in 1946. I said to myself, this time we'll hold the city. It's ours and we won't let them take it away from us. But later when we had to attack, I no longer thought in the same way. Do you remember that old workman at the Huai River bridge, and what he said?"

Shen recalled the time when they were battling southward along the Peking-Hankow railway. They forced a crossing across the Huai River, but the big iron bridge had been blown up and was enveloped in flames which rose high into the sky. When Shen rushed to the river bank the smoke was as thick as that of an over-turned stove. The enemy had fled. Suddenly he saw an old man standing on the bank. He was motionless and his eyes, gazing at the destroyed bridge, were filled with tears. The commanders of the First and Second Companies, the political instructor and some soldiers came up, and they all started to talk to the old man. He was the head of a small workshop on the Peking-Hankow railway, where he had worked ever since the railway was built, taking care of the road and repairing the bridge. Only once did he think of blowing up the bridge . . . it was when the Japanese came.

But he could not bring himself to do it — so he hid his tools and fled. Tears were running down his cheeks as he told his story. Distressed and blushing Shen had caught hold of his hand and said: "Old comrade, it's our fault, we've come too late."

Chen broke in on his thought, "What was it the old man said? He said, 'you must settle this account for me'. Yes, Commander, we must settle it." His voice trembled and he went on, almost pleadingly, "Today, Commander, we won't be too late."

Suddenly he heard a pleased laugh and someone seized hold of Shen's shoulders from behind.

"Old Li, Old Li!" exclaimed Shen, grabbing hold of the political instructor and holding him tight.

"Let go, let go, you're hurting my wound," said Li.

Shen released him, "Why did you come, you are really too bad. Old Li, do you know, today . . . ?"

"Yes, I heard, the divisional commander told me all about it. Isn't it wonderful? I had a hard time trying to catch up with you. But you can't get rid of me so easily."

Shen smiled to himself in the dark and thought of his doubts earlier on: "do I still have to criticise the commander of the First Company? We're all like this: we suffer and make sacrifices, and sometimes we have our own troubles — but personal interests are always in the end subjected to the cause of revolution."

The other two were a little ahead, and suddenly they both gave a cry of alarm. Shen ran forward and through the darkness he saw a fire raging ahead.

He turned and shouted to his men, "The enemy has set fire to the bridge! Forward! To the bridge!"

Chen Ming-ho took up his red flag and broke into a run through the brambles down the slope to the broad river below. The men came surging down the rocks after him, through the trees and bushes, to the bridge.

Shen reached the bank together with his men. He could see that the fire had just been started and the framework of the bridge was still intact. Suddenly ahead, he espied the company commander with his red flag rushing to the bridge, and then on to it, through the flames. Then the firing from the other side began with a sputter of rifleshots. Shen grabbed a light machine gun from the shoulders of a soldier, and throwing himself on the ground he began firing to cover the attack of his men. Beside him,

almost at once a second machine gun started firing. He raised his head, he could no longer see the figure of the company commander, he saw only the dark shadows of his men disappearing into the flames over the bridge. Suddenly one figure stopped, staggered, and then toppled over the bridge into the raging current below. Shen clenched his teeth and went on firing.

Soon the firing stopped and the soldiers started putting out the fire.

Shen got up from what he now noticed was a pool of muddy water, but in spite of his dripping body, he laughed happily. Turning, he saw next to him the political instructor — he had been firing the other machine gun by his side. They both smiled, and then started together to the bridge. That part of the river directly under the bridge was not broad but the current was swift and strong. In the middle of the bridge Shen stopped abruptly and looked down at the swirling waters visible in the flickering light of the fire which was now nearly out. He did not know who had fallen there but he thought, "Comrade, you died a hero's death."

Suddenly the political instructor took out a little metal ink-box, and with swift brush-strokes he wrote on a pillar of the bridge: "The First Company of the First Battalion of a certain division captured this bridge on October 1, 1949."

The first faint light of dawn was showing, and the men had assembled again. When Shen saw the company commander, he asked, "What did you do to your eyebrows?" Chen put up his hand to his forehead, cursed, and then grinned happily.

Shen would not let the men stop to rest. He urged them forward towards the provincial border. When the sun came out they were climbing a hill still in pursuit of the enemy. The first rays were coming through the bamboos and small pines that thickly clustered the slope of the hillside.

Shen stopped when he got to the top. He looked happily at the scenery around him. The morning air in the South was delightfully fresh. Patches of rice-fields stretching into the distance were ruffled by the early morning breeze. The trees sparkled in the sunshine.

Suddenly there came the sound of galloping hoofs, and a minute later the divisional commander slipped from his horse in their midst. He walked slowly towards the battalion commander, who, taken by surprise, turned and saluted. Pointing to the ground

under his feet the divisional commander said: "Comrade Shen Kuei-liang, tell your men that this is the provincial border. The last provincial border!"

The eyes of the battalion commander, surprised and delighted, shone with joy. He shouted:

"Commander, we have successfully fulfilled our task!"

The divisional commander did not say anything — he looked about him with knitted brows. Sixteen or seventeen years ago, as a member of the Communist Youth League he had fought in this region as a guerrilla. His home lay not far ahead. Then he looked at his watch and said, as if to himself: "Six o'clock. Victory at six o'clock." He turned to the battalion commander: "We must not stop. Let us march on."

To the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea

by TING LING

I have seen jade and cornelian carved by the cunning hand of a master craftsman; it is precious because it records the workman's labour and pains. And I have seen gorgeous embroideries; they are beautiful because they tell us of the inspiration of working men. But your name is more precious and more splendid because it is the banner of truth; it shows the glorious spirit of sacrifice, of everything for the just cause. When we see the words "Chinese People's Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Volunteer Army", a feeling of majesty and devotion rises in us, for you are doing exactly what the peoples of the world eagerly wish to be done; you are fighting the common enemy of mankind — American imperialism — for the Fatherland, for the integrity and building up of our beautiful New China, for world peace, and the happiness of future generations.

People's Volunteers! You are the ones who will bring to a successful conclusion a most glorious and significant stage of the world's history; your endurance, your wisdom, and your courage are sung by peace-loving people in the whole world; you are the model for innumerable generations stretching into the far future.

And where have you come from? You have come from Mao Tse-tung's China, from the side of machines; you have taken off your soiled workman's overalls and donned battle array. You were models of labour in the factories; you have set up new records in the industrialisation of our country. But when you heard that the American imperialists had pointed their big guns

towards the banks of the Yalu River, you heaved your muskets to your shoulders with your hands familiar with a spanner; and for the defence of the Fatherland, to preserve the industrial construction of our country, you are marching towards Korea!

And you farmers of the countryside — you have taken part in the Agrarian Reform; you have engaged in active conflict with the feudal landlord class and extinguished the ancient system of feudal exploitation; you have made a complete turnover, and obtained land, cattle and sheep; yet you do not wish to sit back and enjoy your newly gained fortune — on the contrary, you are making fresh endeavours. You have always been frugal and careful, giving your harvest to the common good in support of the war of liberation and independence, but now that you have heard that the Korean people are suffering insults and injuries from the American imperialists, that inhuman MacArthur is more savage and insane even than the Mikado, you cannot contain yourselves; you wipe the mud from your fingers and add your names to the list of volunteers; you say goodbye to the land that you have tilled, and you go for the sake of our brother nation, the suffering people of Korea.

And you, glorious fighters for the Revolution! You have been on the Long March; you have crossed snowy mountains and grassy plains; you have tramped from Kiangsi to the Shensi base. You have resisted Japanese imperialism on the great plain of North China, on the shores of the Yellow Sea, on Mount Taihang, on the banks of the Yangtze; attack and counter-attack wrought you into steel until the capitulation of Japan. Then you wished to lay down your arms and you should have been able to do so, to return to your home districts, to see the wife you left so soon after marriage, to see the child born in your absence, to greet your white-haired mother; but since American imperialism supported the bandit organisation of Chiang Kai-shek, you could not lay by your uniforms or put down your guns, and so for the liberation of the people, you marched once more to the battlefield. You remember the march from Hopei to the Northeast, from the Northwest to the Southeast, the defence of Szepingkai which made a stir both at home and abroad, the seven battles and seven great victories of North Kiangsu which froze the courage of the enemy; and when Hu Chung-nan attacked Yenan, thousands and thousands of his troops were trapped in the Huanglung Mountains. Ah!

Just think! How you covered the whole of China in 1949, from North to South, from West Liaoning to Tientsin, from Tsinan to Huaihai; how, surmounting the Great Wall, you hurried across the Yellow River as on wings, to the banks of the Yangtze, and when the peace talks broke down, you crossed the dangerous Yangtze in one night, chasing the American-supported Chiang into the sea, forcing him and his minions to curl up on the narrow island of Taiwan where they are trying to prolong their last breath. You have sworn, with your guns raised in the air, that you will not lay them down until the reactionaries are completely exterminated. So you went from the icebound, snowy fields of the North to Hainan in the South. But directly you heard that the Americans together with Syngman Rhee were disrupting Korea worse than ever, you remembered your brothers-in-arms who had marched at your side to battle — for the liberation of China; the Korean people have eaten snow with you, have sailed the Yangtze with you, have climbed high mountains with you, and together you have captured cannons and tanks and machine guns; therefore you could not let them return alone to their own country; you had to go with them to drive out MacArthur. So again you raised your guns sanctified by battle and swore an oath; you asked to join the volunteers, for the defence of home and country, to share the hardships and difficulties of our comrades whose fortune is linked with our own; and so you crossed the Yalu River.

Where have you come from? Each has come from his post. In the schools, the youths have bitten open their fingers to write down in blood their wish to join the volunteers. And you who have not yet faced the experiences of life, the first thing that you know is that aggressive imperialism must be opposed; and what you believe in, you accomplish without the least delay.

The political working units have gone to the front, followed by the medical corps with you, my old friend, Li Lan-ting. I saw you only two months ago at the big meeting of combat heroes and models of labour; your form and figure are familiar to me; you broke a rib saving the wounded on an East China battlefield; you are so small that when we were in Budapest, there wasn't a single foreign friend who thought you over sixteen years old — everyone was amazed at your record of heroic deeds. Now again you are marching in front, short and spare but mighty, a volunteer who

does not know the meaning of retreat! Do you know how proud I am for having such a friend as you?

We have had gatherings to send you off; in the factories, the villages, the army, the schools, the administrations, we have em braced you with the fervour burning like fire in our hearts, gazing at you with moist eyes, showing you our respect with tight hand-clasps; we have accompanied you to the railway station, or to the first stage beyond the city. I cannot tell you all that is in my heart and it is not necessary to tell you all. We know each other well; we are of one mind; we are working with the same aim; we want to go with you; we also have signed up; we are your reinforcements. The Chinese people are all pulling together. We wish you victory. We wish victory to the Korean people. May the world obtain lasting peace through our efforts!

And now you have ferried across the heavily bombarded Yalu River; you have entered the bombed cities and villages of Korea where the houses have collapsed into a stretch of stubble; you have seen the Korean people, how they are homeless, how everything that they possessed has been burnt by the incendiary bombs of the American imperialists; shivering in thin summer clothes in the depth of winter, they looked after you, told you of their bitter sorrows; they want to join you in wresting back the territory occupied and dishonoured by the American imperialists. The Korean people have our own indomitable quality. Although you are in Korea, it is the same as being in China. The people there and the volunteers are all one family.

You have seen the Korean People's Army, how they liberated Inchon and Seoul. They are young; they are brave; they have General Kim Il Seng. They also have hugged you with ardour burning in their hearts, and clasped your hands tightly in theirs to show their close relationship with you. Together you are bivouacing in the mountains, sharing the tents on the ground, gnawing the same snow to allay your thirst, and feeding off the same dry provisions. There have been all sorts of battles in the world but no one has endured such hardships as yours. Thinking back upon the terrible anti-mopping-up operations in the war against Japan, you would realise it was a tame affair in comparison.

The puny officers and soldiers of American imperialism dare not force matters; they are afraid of you, and so they have to use innumerable bombers to let fall a hail of bombs, manufactured

from the blood and sweat of the American people, upon the length and breadth of Korea. They want to lay flat the hoary-headed mountains, leaving no paths and no chance of smoke rising from the homesteads; from night 'til morning, and from morning 'til night, hundreds of aeroplanes are covering the sky. Directly they see a bit of house that might afford shelter, a patch of tall grass that might act as a covering, they bomb it and set it on fire. They believe that they can conquer everything with money, with aeroplanes and bombs; their men are told, if you are in danger, it doesn't matter if you throw away all your arms; as long as you escape with your lives, there are tanks and guns in plenty.

But immediately after you arrived in Korea, you began devouring the enemy; in the Battle of Unsan alone, you killed and captured over ten thousand of the American and Syngman Rhee bandits; you released batch after batch of prisoners until they had to be hidden by their cowardly commanders and were forbidden to interview the correspondents. The captives said to you, "Your methods of fighting are extraordinary; you press upon us simultaneously from in front and behind, from the right and the left. Even though we Americans have pretty long legs, what chance was there to run away? We could only kneel down and surrender." Those who have returned from the front have told us how the Americans surrender. How could we refrain from laughing? Truman could hardly mobilise his invasion forces under the slogan of "Death rather than capture", for how could he say, "For the sake of our monopoly capitalists, Wall Street millionaires, armament merchants, the Marshall Plan, the extension of our despotic rule over the whole world, the American people must invade Korea, attack China, oppose the Soviet Union, and go against world peace; for these causes you must give your blood and die." And so MacArthur could only deceive his men with wishes to end the war quickly so that they could return to the U.S.A. to spend Christmas with their wives.

MacArthur is like a mad dog; he believes too much in his own barking; he has learnt no lesson from the failure of the American policy of support to Chiang Kai-shek; he pays no notice whatever to the words spoken by Chairman Mao, "The Chinese people are unmatchable." He looks down too much upon the Chinese people. When our delegate, Wu Hsiu-ch'uan, was at Lake Success, once again he started a "final attack to end the war",

hoping to obtain a bargaining basis for the shifty trucking of Dulles, Acheson, Trygve Lie, and Chiang Kai-shek's little lapdog, Chiang T'ing-fu. But he indulged too much in wishful thinking! The second day of the attack, he came across the Chinese People's Volunteers and the Korean People's Army; they seemed to have dropped down from heaven, to have sprung from the earth; their number could not be guessed. His artillery became ineffective, his aeroplanes proved futile, and his men obeyed the orders of their commanders to save their lives leaving everything behind. Besides which, they blamed MacArthur, "You were tricking us; even if the war was ended, how could we who are not entitled to fly have returned home by Christmas?"

Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Chinese People's Volunteers! The whole world is looking towards you. Every day we stand by the radios listening for news of you; we read of you in the newspapers, and trace your movements on the map. We think of you when the wind is howling, when snow is falling, when the night comes upon us; when we take up our bowls at meal-time, we think of you. Those in sorrow think of you, and the happy also think of you.

Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Chinese People's Volunteers! You are like an immense star hanging in the high vault of a cold winter night; you are like a colossal ball of fire flaming in the wilds. You are the embodiment of courage; you stand firm in our hearts like a statue that we look up to; you are the embodiment of our ideals — you are calling to us — and we will admire you for ever!

Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Chinese People's Volunteers! White-haired old women are sewing clothes for you, stitching all their sufferings into them so that you will remember the bitterness of this, our modern age. And girls of fifteen are making gift bags for you, putting into them their youth, their hopes for the future, their happiness and their imaginings, so that you will remember that all your sufferings and hardships are for the sake of the future generation!

I have too much to say to you — I wouldn't be able to write it all down, there wouldn't be room to print it all, and it couldn't be all recorded on a sound recorder. Besides which, you wouldn't have time to read it or to listen to it all, so I have to cut myself short. Well then, all right, let me tell you about it another time;

now I will only stretch out my hand and grasp your hands warmly in mine, gazing at you in my mind's eye, repeating the most precious, splendid, and honourable name that I know — Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Chinese People's Volunteers! We know each other well; we are all working towards the same goal; I am going to Korea too; I also have signed up; I am among your reinforcements. So I wish you victory, and victory to the Korean people. May the world obtain lasting peace through our efforts!

REPORTS FROM THE KOREAN FRONT

by WEI WEI

I THOSE MOST TO BE LOVED

Every day in Korea I find much to move me, the tide of thought and feeling at full spate. This makes me want to tell everything to the friends at home. Above all I want to tell you of the important chapter in my mental and emotional development when I came to realise more and more profoundly which people are most to be loved.

Who most deserve our love? Our troops, our warriors, it is they, I feel, who are most to be loved.

There may be people secretly saying to themselves: "Do you mean those 'soldiers'?" They can see nothing extraordinary or out of the way about them. To all appearances they have not much learning nor any great sensibility. But I assure you this is because you have too little contact with our fighters and so have failed to understand their fine integrity of character, their iron strength of purpose, their simple modesty of nature, their beautiful nobility of heart!

Let me tell a story.

It was during the second campaign, when some volunteer troops were thrusting fiercely through to the enemy's rear to cut off their line of retreat at Kun Wu Ri. They reached Sê Dang Chum just as the enemy got there, prepared to head straight down the high road. At once the advance company (the Third Company) took up a position on a small bare hilltop beside the road, to hold back the enemy, and a fierce battle started. In an attempt to save their lives the enemy used thirty-two planes and a dozen tanks in a combination of powerful attacks on the company's position. The whole hilltop was pounded flat. Napalm bombs enveloped the position with red flames. But the brave fighters in the smoke and fire on the ridge shouted slogans at the top of their voices and killed foe after foe in front of their position. Enemy corpses piled up like sheaves before the hill, and the ridge too ran red with blood. But still the enemy attacked in the teeth of death to save their main force from annihilation. This battle

raged for eight hours without respite, until the brave fighters' ammunition was exhausted. The enemy pressing up took the hilltop, forcing them down toward the foot of the hill. Their own bodies caught fire from the napalm bombs. But even then the fighters would not retreat; throwing down their rifles, with tongues of flames licking hungrily over their entire bodies, they flung themselves upon the enemy, seizing them fast till the fire from their bodies burned to death the foe who wanted to take their position.

The commander of this regiment told me that after the battle all the rifles on this company's position were found smashed to pieces, while machine gun parts were scattered all over the hillside. The bodies of the heroes were discovered in all kinds of postures, some clasping the enemies' waists, some their heads; some with their hands at the enemies' throats had thrown them to the ground, falling with them to burn to death together. There was one soldier still tightly clutching a hand grenade, its case spattered with brains; the head of the American devil who had died with him had been struck, and the brains poured onto the ground. Another soldier still held half an enemy's ear between his clenched teeth. When the bodies of the heroes were being buried, their hands were locked together in such an iron grip on the enemy it was often impossible to unclasp them without breaking the fingers. . . . This company suffered very heavy casualties, but they killed over three hundred of the enemy, and, what was more important, enabled our main force to come up and wipe out the enemy.

This was one of the greatest battles in the Korean war — the battle of Song Go Boong, it is called, or the battle of Sê Dang Chum. And, lest it should be thought needful to set up a memorial, let me give the names of the heroes who went in flames against the enemy, and, armed only with bayonets, fought and died with the enemy. Their names are: Wang Chin-ch'uan, Hsin Yu-t'ang, Hu Ch'uan-chiu, Ching Yu-chu, Wang Wen-ying, Hsiung Kuan-ch'uan, Wang Chin-hou, Chao Hsi-chieh, Sui Chin-shan, Li Yu-an, Ting Chen-tai, Chang Kuei-sheng, Ts'ui Yu-liang, Li Shu-kuo. There was another warrior too whom it was impossible to identify. May the fame of these, our heroes, live for ever!

The regimental commander who told me these things spoke slowly and with deep feeling. He said that when he was burying the heroes in their battleground he shed tears. "Don't think that I was distressed because of them," he went on to say. "I was proud of them! Our men are so magnificent, so dear, I was moved to tears by what they had done."

Friends, what do you feel when you hear of such heroism? Don't you feel that our fighters are lovable? Don't you feel we should take pride in a country that can boast of heroes such as these?

Our warriors are most implacable to the enemy, but most kind to the Korean people, filled with the friendliest spirit of internationalism.

On the north bank of the Han River I met a young soldier called Ma Yu-hsiang, only twenty-one this year, from Ch'ing Kang district in Heilungkiang. He had a dark, ruddy face, was on the tall side, and looked as he stood there as wholesome and charming as the red *kaoliang* stalk in the autumn fields. However since he had only just come back from the front he was rather tired. His eyes were still somewhat bloodshot. He had belonged to an artillery company, but one night he was woken up by the sound of crying, and when he went out to look he found an old Korean woman sitting on a ridge crying. Her home had been bombed, so

she had fixed up a matting shelter in the hills, but now that had been bombed too. . . . On his return he went straight to company headquarters and asked to be transferred to an infantry company, and because the infantry was short of men his request was granted. "Aren't you fighting the enemy just the same in the artillery?" I asked him. "Well, there's a difference," he said. "The closer you are to the enemy, the more kick you get out of fighting, the more satisfaction you get out of the revenge on the enemy!"

During the days and nights on the south bank of the Han he left the battlefield once to prepare food. He had no sooner reached the village when several planes flew over to strafe, and then dropped two big incendiary bombs. Several houses caught fire, the whole place was blazing and thick with smoke, so he dared not go any further. Just then he heard the sound of a child crying from the smoke and flames. Immediately he stepped forward through the dense smoke to have a closer look, and saw a middle-aged Korean man lying in the courtyard; but the child's crying came from inside the house. He walked to the door, but the flames were so fierce it was impossible to get in, the paper on the windows was already on fire. The child's cries were carried out with the dense eddies of smoke, he could hear them clearly. When he reached this point in his story, he said, "Could I not go in? I couldn't! I thought, if this happened in my Fatherland I could go in, but should I not go in in Korea? Aren't the Koreans the same as our own countrymen? So I kicked open the door, and dashed in. Whew! The room was full of stifling smoke, I could hear the child crying, but couldn't see anybody. I couldn't keep my eyes open, my face burnt as if it had been slashed with knives, I didn't know if my clothes had caught fire or not, but I didn't worry about that, simply groping blindly on the floor. First I felt a grownup, but when I tugged there was no movement, and then across the grownup's body I felt a child's leg; so I picked it up and jumped through the doorway. When I looked at the child, I saw he was a very nice little fellow. He was wearing a little shirt, bare-legged, and he was stamping his little feet and crying like anything. I thought to myself: 'I can't help it if you cry, if I don't save your mother, who's going to look after you?' By then the fire was even bigger, all the wallpaper was in flames. I set the boy down and dashed through the burning doorway again. When I tugged at the woman inside, she gave a moan, but I couldn't move her. I pressed closer to look, and saw that blood from her face had stained the white dress over her breast red, and her eyes were already closed. Knowing she couldn't live I hurried out, beat out the flames on my clothes, and picked up the little fatherless, motherless boy. . . ."

Friends, what do you feel when you hear of such deeds? Don't you feel that our fighters are most lovable?

Everybody knows of the hardships of the Korean war. But how do the men take it? Once I saw a soldier in an air raid shelter, eating alternate mouthfuls of roasted flour and snow. I asked him: "Don't you feel it's tough?" He held in his hand the spoonful of snow he was just carrying to his mouth, smiled and said: "Of course we do! We're only human in our revolutionary army! But it's just there that our glory lies." He set the spoon down, and went on passionately: "Take eating snow, for instance. I'm eating snow here so that our fellow countrymen won't have to eat snow. They can sit in snug, bright rooms drinking tea, with a small stove by them on which to cook whatever they like to eat." Then

indicating the narrow, damp air shelter, he said: "Or take this squatting in a shelter as another example. So fearfully stuffy. Look at the fine sun outside and the flat road, but we can't walk out there. But by my squatting in a shelter, my countrymen won't have to take shelter. They can walk as they please on the high roads. They can ride if they like, or else walk, chatting as they stroll along. How great that is! So — " He put the snow in his mouth, and said, as if in conclusion, "What does it matter if I shed a little blood here, what does it matter things are tough?" "Are you ever homesick?" I asked. He smiled: "Everybody is, it would be a lie to say anything else. But I don't want to go back. If I went back and the people at home asked, 'How have you carried out the job we entrusted to you?' how could I answer them? How could I say 'Korea is half red, half black'?" I asked him another question: "You've been through so many dangers and hardships, have you any request to make of your country, or of Korea?" He thought for a moment before answering: "We don't want anything. But to speak frankly this may not be very true. We all want a thing so big — " Smiling he sketched with his fingers something about the size of a coin, and afraid I would not understand, added: "A medal commemorating the liberation of Korea; we'd like to wear it when we go back home."

Friends, there is no need to multiply examples, you can already understand what manner of men our fighters are, can understand the quality of such men, the beauty and greatness of their spirit. As warriors, as men, they stand in the first rank in world history. They are the finest flower of all good peace-loving people in the world! Flower of our Fatherland of which we should be proud! We are proud that our Fatherland can boast of such heroes, we glory in being born in such a heroic land!

My friends, when you take the earliest tram to your factory, when you shoulder your plough and make for the fields, when you finish drinking your beancurd milk and pick up your satchel to go to school, when you sit quietly at the desk in your office planning the work for the day, when you pop a slice of apple into your child's mouth, when you stroll in your free time with your beloved one, — friends, do you realise your own happiness? Perhaps you will look at me with raised eyebrows, saying, "This is quite commonplace!" But those who have returned from Korea appreciate the happiness of your life. I beg you to realise the nature of your happiness, because only so can you really understand the reason for our warriors' selfless struggle in Korea. Friends! You already love our Fatherland, love our leaders, I ask you to love our fighters better, for truly they are most to be loved!

II OUR FIGHTERS' FATHERLAND

How is it, although our Volunteers are still using inferior weapons, far from being frightened by the enemy's terrible artillery and aeroplanes they are proving themselves the bravest and strongest fighting force in the world? How is it they have been able to inflict one crushing defeat after another upon the world's great-

est imperialist power — the American invading army? To put it another way, what mighty force is there upholding every one of our troops? What is the secret of our heroes' strength?

I have gradually been finding out the answer to these questions.

One evening, soon after my arrival in Korea, I went to see the chief of the political department of a certain army. To welcome me he poured a mug of boiled water and dispatched his guard to fetch a packet of white sugar. I watched his deft movements as he picked up a spoon and filled it with sugar; but just as he was going to empty it into my mug, he stopped to look at me, and said:

"Comrade, this is from our Fatherland."

He spoke very slowly, lingering especially over the words 'our Fatherland', as if people would not understand if he spoke faster. Only when he had finished speaking did he pour the sugar into the mug.

I was gripped by a strong emotion. . . . I thought, "Although the term 'Fatherland' has often appeared in newspapers and textbooks, it isn't in common use among the masses; but here at the Korean front, on the lips of this Political Department Chief, what a world of meaning the term 'Fatherland' conveys!"

When our troops came for a rest on the north bank of the river Han, I went to have a talk with a certain squad. The fighters sitting beside me bore all about them traces of the days and nights at the front; some of their uniforms showed where they had been burnt by incendiaries. Far from appearing proud, they waited very modestly for my questions. Struck by their lovable simplicity I thought: "So these are the world-famous victors over imperialism! These are the heroes who defend their positions stubbornly to the last man!" I could not help saying admiringly: "Comrades! You're having a hard time."

But the words were scarcely out of my mouth, when they answered, practically at the same time:

"For the Fatherland it can't be considered hard!"

"It's for our Fatherland."

"We do it for the Fatherland!"

And a tall and powerfully built soldier stretched out his big blistered hands to me, and said grinning: "These hands of mine are working simply for the Fatherland!" As they spoke they all looked at me keenly.

As for me, I could not at once express all the word meant to me, I was only aware of its great power to move me.

Even when our discussion was over, the men were reluctant to leave. One of them looked at me consideringly, and asked: "Comrade, are you from Peking?"

"Yes."

"Well then," he said, looking at me closely, "do you know how our Chairman Mao is? Is he well?"

Before I had time to answer, someone else put in: "I think he's so busy, he must be losing weight."

"Yes, he must be losing weight," several others agreed, nodding their heads,

"Of course Chairman Mao's very busy" I told them. "But his health is still as good as ever."

Then the young fighters, looking happy and cheerful, started asking one question after another. Some asked about T'ien An Men, some about the factories in the Northeast, some about land reform in their parts, some about the students

who had joined the army, some about last year's harvest in China, some about how far certain railways had really been extended, questioning me about matters I seldom gave a thought to. In brief, they were concerned about everything taking place in our great country. They spoke very enthusiastically, as if they were speaking of someone very near and dear to them whom they would never tire of discussing.

"Well," I said, smiling, "you certainly love our Fatherland!"

"Ah, we're not the only ones; one of our officers wrote a poem about it!"

"What poem?" I asked at once.

One of the fighters recited:

Children of China, shoulder your rifles,
Cross the border to defend your Fatherland.
To resist America and aid Korea is heroic;
Let us add fresh glory to our country's name!

After the meeting I told the regimental political commissar of these fighters' burning patriotism. He nodded, and said pretty well all the troops were like this; and then he told me the following story.

A certain squad leader Chiang Shih-fu in one of the regiments was a committee member of the Communist Party branch. In everything he was a stickler for truth and a strict disciplinarian, who came down heavily on the slightest infringement of orders. During the fighting at Kyung An Ri on the south bank of the Han, he killed a good many of the enemy, and was seriously wounded himself. This honest, admirable soldier was about to die, but he did not change countenance; only when he looked at his comrades his eyes expressed deep emotion. His comrades gazed at him, and he at them. A medical worker hurried over to bandage his wound, but he shook his head, saying quietly:

"Comrades, I shan't be with you any more."

His comrades pressed closer to him, and said: "Old Chiang, is there anything you want to say?"

He shook his head, clasped the hand that was nearest him, and said: "As long as the people of our Fatherland know how I died . . . " As he said this he smiled contentedly, and slowly and naturally his eyes closed. . . .

After telling this story the political commissar said gravely and earnestly: "Of course before we left home we all knew we were fighting for our Fatherland; but only after we got here and saw all that was happening, did we really feel we began to know what our Fatherland meant to us and how much we loved it! Take our regimental commander as an example," he went on. "During the second campaign, after our regiment had been fighting without respite for several days and nights, we received orders to advance to the enemy's rear, which involved a forced march of nearly fifty miles. The troops had no time for meals, pressing forward day and night. When we had gone some thirty miles, the men were too tired and hungry to move. Some were so exhausted their heads were nodding, some had blisters all over their feet and could only limp along, and one battalion sat down to rest. But when our regimental commander saw one battalion had stopped, old and weak as he was he hurried panting to reprimand the battalion commander; after which, standing there, he called out loudly, for everyone to hear:

"'Don't forget where we've come from! — We're from north of the Yalu River!' Everybody looked at him, and no one said a word. He went on, pointing to the north, and asking sternly: 'Comrades, what lies north of the Yalu River?'

"'Our Fatherland!' answered the troops.

"'Yes, our Fatherland,' replied the commander very gravely, and asked again: 'Well, if we rest after only covering thirty miles out of fifty, and let the enemy get away, won't we be letting down our Fatherland?' "

When he reached this point in his story the political commissar could not help smiling, and said: "Don't you think it's strange, as soon as our Fatherland was mentioned it seemed to give them new strength! Without halting our troops went straight to our destination. For the last mile or so of the road a good many of the men's feet were so swollen they didn't march to their destination, they crawled there."

So strong is the hold of our Fatherland on the hearts of our fighters, its name is not only on their lips but enthroned in their inmost hearts.

One evening, on my way to the front, I saw a group of men standing near a village ahead. Somebody was saying in a loud voice: "Friends, I didn't want to go behind, but they've forced me to!"

I went forward to see what was happening, and saw several stretcher bearers from the Northeastern Provinces standing round a wounded man and talking to him. The wounded soldier was only twenty-one or two; he looked a typical volunteer with nothing about him to excite remark. His head was swathed in bandages and his hands were exposed. Seeing me standing there, one of the stretcher bearers said admiringly:

"This young rascal really is game!"

"He's tough enough for a true Chinese," put in another. "He killed a lot of American devils single-handed. A big shell landed just beside him and a shrapnel wounded his head, making him unconscious. But when the medical officer had bandaged him up and wanted to send him to the rear, he recovered consciousness, and said: 'What do you want to send me to the rear for? I'm not going.' And posting himself by a machine gun he started fighting again until he had a finger shot off. This time his superior officer told him to go to the rear, but he said, 'Look how big a man is, what does it matter if he loses a small piece of flesh! Even if I can't fire I can still load the gun.' Because the fighting was very fierce he was allowed to stay; but he was wounded for the third time when his other hand was hit by shrapnel as he was throwing a hand grenade. Afraid his commanding officer would send him to the rear he went up to him and said: 'Please, for goodness sake, let me stay here. Our squad leader's dead, I simply can't go to the rear. I can't use my hands, but I can use my mouth: I ask to be given liaison work!' They say that while he was speaking, blood from his hand dripped off his finger to the ground, but he didn't turn a hair. His superior officer comforted him and urged him to go to the rear, but still he refused. Finally the officer ordered him: 'Go back! This is the Party's decision!' Ho! Only then would this young rascal turn his back on the fighting. Did you hear him grumbling just now?"

"Yes" said the wounded man from the stretcher. Perhaps he was over excited, for he still wanted to make gestures, but his hands would not move, only

his elbows twitched. "I think, if I hadn't come back here I could have carried out liaison work all right." Saying this his eyes flashed brightly, looking at me as if to say: "Comrade, don't you believe me?"

I went up to him and squatted beside him, saying reassuringly: "Comrade, you really are game, you really have fought bravely!" Who would have thought that my saying this would make him feel embarrassed; his bright eyes showed a youngster's shyness, and he gave a faint smile.

I lifted his bedding and covered up his hands which were outside. Then, looking at him, I asked him the real reason for his courage.

He smiled, then answered seriously, "Comrade, how could I be cowardly? Just think of all the things we've seen since we crossed the Yalu River!" He went on to describe how all the way from the Yalu River to the Han River was either scorched earth or raging fire; sometimes they passed along streets with fires raging on both sides, or pitched camp by the bodies of slaughtered Koreans. Speaking of these things his voice grew bitter, and he told me: "Once we stayed in a village; it was all right when we got there in the evening, and the people gave us a warm welcome. It so happened that the man in whose house we were staying had a mother who looked very like my mother. She was in her forties too, only she wore a white tunic and skirt. I was tired out that day and I slept soundly. When I woke up I found that someone had mended the holes in my trousers. When I asked my comrades I found the old woman had told her daughter-in-law to hold the lamp while she sat on the bed and mended them for me; and I felt she was just like my own mother! But the next day when I came back from duty I found the whole village blazing, and every single house demolished; when I got to the place where we'd been billeted the old woman's daughter-in-law was dead, the old woman's legs had been blown off, but she was still holding the child, crawling along on her stumps of legs. When she saw me she cried. And I shed tears too. I quickly took the child from her, and carried the old woman on my back to the clinic. Some of our squad were stamping for rage, some of them were cursing, some of them were crying. I couldn't sleep all that night. I kept tossing and turning, and thinking: so this is what American imperialism means! In order to occupy Korea they want to exterminate the Korean people! Then I thought of myself: in the old days the Japs killed my Dad, Chiang Kai-shek took my elder brother, only my mother was left. But thanks to Chairman Mao's good leadership we won through, our Chinese people became independent, a new China was built up, I got given a few *mou* of land and was able to marry and have children. I didn't have to look after other people's pigs and sheep any more, going cold and hungry. I had a home, I had a country. But if we let the American devils get to China, would my old mother live? Would my wife and children live? Not only would they kill them and burn them; they would tear up the very foundations of my home!" Here he paused for a moment, his young eyes filled with pain, as if reliving that time. Then he went on: "That night as soon as I shut my eyes I seemed to see how good our Fatherland was, how great, how densely populated. If we let America bomb and burn there, what would become of it? . . . " Then he cried out eagerly: "Comrade, was it an easy thing to build up our new China? Who knows how many comrades have shed blood and sweat for it, fighting from the South to the North, from the North to the South; who knows how many miles they covered, how many battles they

fought, or how many foxholes they dug in all sorts of country! Sometimes they risked their lives for a small building, or shed their blood for a few yards of ground. Now American bullets have buried themselves in many people's bodies. New China was bought at the cost of our flesh and blood. . . . When we came abroad this time and were passing the Northeast, I looked at the forest of factory chimneys, large and small, with smoke eddying out from them, and I felt as pleased as anything. You can't imagine how happy I was, or what I was thinking. Do we want to let them overshadow our people's world again? Do we want them to reduce all our construction work to ashes? No, if those dogs dare lift a finger against our Fatherland I'll have their blood, I'll make them realise they're only mortal!" He was so moved he couldn't help taking his bandaged hands out again: "What I think is, if only we can protect our new China so that our people, people like my mother, are safe, it doesn't matter if I die away from home! I was wounded several times in this fighting, and they wanted me to come to the rear, but I don't mind dying. What does it matter if we shed a little blood for our Fatherland and for the suffering Korean people? . . . "

Friends, this is what I wanted to tell you; this is the nobility of thought of the fighters at the Korean front, this is the great invincible spirit of our heroes. This it is that lights the flame of victory in the most cruel and arduous fighting.

Friends, what do you feel when you hear of these things? Here I have told you the facts frankly, wanting every child of China, whatever clothes he wears, whatever work he does, to love our Fatherland more! 'Fatherland' is no common word, it is a name most beloved, most prized, most sacred. "What is our Fatherland?" No one has been able to describe it adequately in a few words, for that is, I believe, impossible. To some people its name may call to mind their dear, simple parents; perhaps to others it is the beloved smiling faces of wife and children; to others it may mean China's magnificent mountains and rivers or rich culture; to still others it may be the Red Flag fluttering in the wind over T'ien An Men, stained with the blood of innumerable revolutionary martyrs; to some it may mean happy factories wreathing smoke or beautiful parks filled with singing. Of course there is one man of whom all think, one who is a father and a friend to all; day and night he is considering how to guard them from danger, how to enable them to attain all possible happiness — this is the brave captain of whom they are justly proud. Thus 'Fatherland' is the name for all that is most sacred and beautiful. We cannot help being glad to be born for China and proud to die for China, pressing forward for our Fatherland's sake.

III WINTER AND SPRING

Spring, teeming with life, has come to the Korean front where world forces of darkness and light are contending together. Before this season the Chinese and Korean troops had fought shoulder to shoulder all through the winter and defeated American imperialism — greatest and last moribund enemy of the people of the world, piercing the 'paper tiger' and destroying the myth of America's

invincibility. In the people's estimation, however, this arduous, successful phase was only a prelude to greater victories: it had been a fruitful winter, the harbinger of an even greater and more glorious spring.

Let me quote one of the commanding officers to make clear what I mean.

One evening I was sitting in a little room with a regimental commander. A warm, soft wind blew in through the window, carrying the breath of spring, and we started talking without reserve.

"You want to know what our troops accomplished during the winter? Well, really a great deal," he said enthusiastically, and went on, pointing to the electric carbines hanging on the wall: "Let's take the most obvious first. The Americans only started using these new carbines in this Korean war, but ever since our first encounter they've kept on making them over to us. The artillery taken from the enemy is already lined up with our own. I believe we should use these things to hit back at the enemy; don't you think that way our striking power will be increased?"

"The next thing, which I value very much, is that while fighting with this highly mechanised enemy, we have enriched ourselves and taken a step forward." He seemed to want to emphasise this: "Perhaps my own case is particularly striking. I'm the youngest of the regimental cadres. And so for the last few months my brain simply hasn't been still at all. I've steeped myself completely in the study of actual warfare. Now I feel I've made headway; I must have learnt more than during the last few years in the military academy, and all first-hand knowledge too. I feel more and more confident in directing operations. Maybe a lot of people wouldn't appreciate the value of this, but from a commanding officer's point of view it's more delightful than when a peasant sees his barns bursting with grain." Here he suddenly laughed heartily and said: "Don't you think it's odd, these last campaigns have been just right, as if designed specially to train us: the first two campaigns taught us how to destroy the enemy in mobile warfare, the third taught us how to storm strongly defended positions, and the fourth how to hold out. The enemy have already been amazed at our superiority in strategy, and we shall give them ground for more amazement in future."

He seemed in very high spirits as he spoke, with a strange smile on his face, a smile peculiar to the officers in command at the conclusion of a successful fighting. And he went on:

"Some of our achievements are material and can be seen, like the carbines I spoke of just now and howitzers; but there are other things which aren't easily seen, such as the men's thoughts and will. However one must on no account underestimate these imponderables, for when the battle has started their amazing power is evident. They constitute one of the chief factors making for victory. Since we left China to fight this war, I believe each of our men has studied two important textbooks. One is 'The Book of Determination', the other 'The Book of Confidence'. As soon as we crossed the river our comrades started reading 'The Book of Determination', a text written by the American invaders with bombs and incendiaries in the blood of the Korean people. After we crossed the Yalu River and saw the ground covered with rubble and the shambles wherever we went, each of us not only recognised the face of the American imperialists, but realised what imperialism really means. The mere mention of American im-

perialism would cause our men's eyes red with anger. We realised the conditions in Korea today, and the threat to our Fatherland. We came to love our Fatherland and the suffering Korean people more. This 'textbook' made us glad to die if only we could defeat the enemy. In addition, during these four campaigns, thanks to our determination, we kept on winning. That taught us confidence. 'The Book of Confidence' told us: 'It is quite possible to beat the American invaders and their lackeys; even though their armaments are so good and they have naval and air superiority, they can still be beaten.' These two textbooks were not written in ink, but in blood. Under past conditions of warfare we have already defeated the enemy with their superior armaments, and now that our own armaments and tactics are continuously improving, we must surely win even greater victories in future, until the American invading army and its lackeys are buried in the Korean peninsular."

When he reached this point he looked very grave, and paused for several minutes.

"I believe there is still another achievement," he resumed. "That is the ever growing, ever deepening, and ever closer friendship between the Chinese and Korean peoples. Such unity cannot be described with words; it is so strong that no force can ever destroy it. In my opinion, such a close bond of friendship between the peoples of different countries must be unprecedented in history. I'm sure you won't underestimate this factor; this is another deciding factor in annihilating the enemy and winning victory! . . . These are my views."

As we were talking someone outside shouted: "A report!"

The regimental commander drew himself up a little and answered, "Come in!"

The canvas was pushed aside as a messenger came in with two letters. The officer opened them at once, and as he read them he could not help saying to himself with a smile: "Two more of them! Two more of them!"

"Two more what?" I asked.

"Two more letters asking for a front place in the next attack." So saying he tossed the letters on the table.

Spring has come, officers' tables everywhere are piled with similar requests. Letters longing for warfare on a larger scale, greater victories, the letters of spring. When you go round the different companies the men all look as busy as swallows: sharpening their bayonets, polishing the newly captured guns, mending their torn uniforms, leaning against windows writing plans for doing deeds of great daring, sitting alone on the hillsides writing requests to join the Communist Party or the New Democratic Youth League. . . . All this goes to show: Spring, teeming with life, has come to the Korean front where world forces of darkness and light are contending together. This spring will be a spring when the people of our Fatherland and Korea shout and leap for joy; but for the enemy it will be a fearful spring. As we had a fruitful winter, surely we shall have a glorious spring!

IV "DAYS AND NIGHTS" ON THE HAN

It is spring in our Fatherland, but here winter still reigns over all. Silver ice and snow still cover the broad, sinuous river Han which is flanked on both sides by silver mountain ranges; the low, drifting clouds are misty white too, only the pinewoods on the mountain sides and in the valleys stand out in black relief — Such is the natural setting of the Han river front.

The enemy were at some points only fifteen kilometres from Seoul, and even closer to the Han. For some time the officers of the invading U.S. army had been able to see Seoul through their field glasses, and it would take less than twenty minutes to reach the city by jeep. But instead of taking twenty minutes, it took them over nine divisions of men, twenty days and over eleven thousand rascals' lives to dye the snow and ice of those silver mountain ranges red; and yet, when they looked through their field glasses at Seoul, they were not much closer than when they started.

Why was this? How was it that over two hundred thousand troops of this notoriously all-powerful imperialism could not even cover ten kilometres in twenty days?

Was it because their artillery was faulty? No. Their artillery is in fact very formidable. They can batter at a hilltop till the white snow turns black, the shape of the terrain is transformed, pine forests change into fields of stubble, the pine branches shot in all directions. If they could pour all the steel in the world into one battle front in one hour, they would not hold their fire.

Yet still they could not advance.

Was it because they had too few planes? They were not good enough? Or their coordination with the ground forces was poor? No, this was not the reason either. Their planes lord it in the sky, and coordinate well enough with the ground forces. They can, if they wish, drop heavy bombs and incendiaries on our advanced positions and all the villages near the front line, till every part of our battle area is aflame; they can burn the grass-clad mountain sides pitch black.

Well, then, was it because they were half-hearted in their attacks? Far from it. Generally speaking, after the first attack was repulsed a second was organised without much delay. At first they launched two or three attacks a day, later increasing the number to four or five, seven or eight, sometimes even a dozen. Even when American corpses piled up in front of our positions obstructing their own offensive, they would still use a sea of fire, a sea of men to assail our outposts. By the end their attacks were continuous, in several places where our ammunition ran out they forced Syngman Rhee's puppet troops to come to grips with us, and when these had been repulsed they stopped only to construct earthworks fifty metres away from us, then returned to the attack. Their planes and guns bombed and shelled us day and night, in fair weather and foul, with all their might. At night they sent up parachute flares and made a network of searchlights. And finally they even used poison pas. So, apart from the atomic bomb they used everything they had, did all they could do, playing all their trump cards. This offensive was fierce enough.

But did they advance? No.

Well, what then was the reason? The reason was a very simple one: it was that confronting the enemy, in the narrow little outposts on the south bank of

the Han, were crouched the most heroic troops of the world, heroes well trained in war craft.

Naturally warfare is fierce and difficult — Our victory was not, as some people seem to imagine, as easy as stretching out a hand to pluck flowers in a garden or in the fields. Every inch of soil here was hotly contested. The lips of the warriors here were parched, their ears deafened, their eyes red from exhaustion; but still between their parched lips they swallowed a mouthful of dry rations, a mouthful of snow; and when their ears could no longer hear, their bloodshot eyes searched the dense smoke, keeping an unceasing watch ahead. When need arose, they used the butt end of their broken rifles, bayonets and stones to hurl the enemy back; the commanding officers of regiments and divisions here sometimes had to fold up their maps and move to fresh quarters because their own were on fire. The telephone men here had to go out scores of times a day to repair the telephone lines which had been severed. The commanding officers here lived not minute by minute, but second by second!

One evening I visited the small room which was a certain regiment's headquarters. A map was spread out on a small, round Korean table on the *kang*, lit by candlelight, while planes could still be heard droning outside ceaselessly. The deputy divisional commander was studying the map with the regimental commander and political commissar. When they had studied it to their satisfaction the deputy divisional commander — a rather grizzled soldier of middle age — opened a silver cigarette case, and offered us each a cigarette. We were just lighting up from the candle when suddenly, following two sharp reverberations, the candle jumped off the little table and went out. The oil cloth to black out the window was torn down too by the blast. The light of parachute flares outside shone through the window as bright as a full moon.

However nobody moved. The regimental commander picked up the candle from the *kang* where it had fallen, and relit it. The political commissar brushed off the mud that had fallen on the map. The guard blacked out the window again with the oilcloth. And we went on lighting our cigarettes.

The regimental commander, smiling as if to enlist our support, turned to the deputy divisional commander and said: "Deputy Divisional Commander! Don't you think our fighting is something like 'Days and Nights'?"

The deputy divisional commander was silent for a moment, and then answered quietly: "Yes, we are engaged in a warfare of which we have no previous experience. We, no — " he corrected himself, and pointed to the map on the table marked with thick red lines, "every man of us here is undergoing a test like that in 'Days and Nights'. He paused, then suddenly flicked the ash from his cigarette, and smiled slightly: "Only we have many Saburovs!"

On the fiercest day of the battle, in the divisional headquarters, I listened to the divisional political commissar — he had not shaved for days and his eyes were bloodshot. Each time he telephoned his subordinates he would start like this: "Comrades! Are you tired?" And as if not expecting an answer, would go straight on, "We know you're tired." Then in a stern, grave tone of voice: "You should explain clearly to the comrades the reason for holding out to the end; we are holding out to tie the enemy down, so that our troops from the east can wipe them out; we would not carry out a meaningless resistance and attrition. You know that. We have got to hold out till a certain date." After a pause he

LIN CHING-SUN: We Have the Strength to Protect Our New Life

went on: "Another thing you should tell the comrades, what credit is there in being able to defeat the enemy only with planes and big guns? Look at the history of revolution. The arms of the counter-revolutionaries have always been greatly superior to ours, but it is always they who have been defeated, not we. We don't need to speak of superiority in weapons, if only we had equality of armaments, or approach it, the enemy would no longer exist. At present our weapons are inferior to theirs, and it is precisely under these conditions that we must win. That will show the stuff we're made of!" He removed the earphones, as if about to hang up, but hastily held them up again to add: "Our Fatherland will know under what conditions we defeat the enemy!"

And on the field of battle the warriors did indeed fight with a heroic determination equal to that of the political commissar.

Here I want to record the story of how two men defended their position. One of them was called Hsin Chiu-ssu, I questioned him myself. I very soon discovered he was an intelligent lad, quick in the uptake, a native of Heilungkiang, just twenty this year. He had joined the Communist Party barely two years. Now he is a vice squad leader. During the hard fighting since he left our country he, like so many of our men, wore holes in his trousers, but he had patched them up very neatly. He stood there looking so stout-hearted and lovable. One day toward evening, when he returned from an attack on the enemy at the outpost he saw that in his platoon many of his friends had died in their trenches in the postures of firing or throwing hand grenades. Only one soldier, Wang Chih-ch'eng, remained alive. He was still crouching in a foxhole, looking down, apparently quite calm and only firing at long intervals. The enemy did not know how many men there were here and dared not come up. Hsin Chiu-ssu crawled up to Wang Chih-ch'eng and whispered: "Do you have any more cartridges?" Wang Chih-ch'eng answered softly and humorously: "Only these two little fellows, what about you?" Hsin Chiu-ssu made a zero sign with his thumb and forefinger. By now it was dark. The enemy's whistles echoed through the hills, their guns had started to lengthen their range, and from the position behind sounded the babble of a foreign language — it was clear that their company had evacuated its position. "Vice Squad Leader," said Wang Chih-ch'eng, "the company's main strength has already evacuated, why haven't they sent us any word?" "Yes," said Hsin Chiu-ssu, "it's funny they haven't sent us word; but we can't withdraw without orders. Didn't we tell the squad leader, as long as a man was left we'd hold on to the position? With two of us alive how can we abandon it?" Wang Chih-ch'eng nodded and said, "Of course. I made up my mind long ago. All these good comrades have died for the Fatherland, what does it matter if we die!" At once Hsin Chiu-ssu corrected him: "Never say die; when the enemy come we'll hurl stones at them and roll down the slope ourselves, and those frightened devils won't be able to find us. That's how I got here just now." When he said this it seemed to remind Wang Chih-ch'eng of something, and he said, "Vice Squad Leader, we two'd better keep in different foxholes, that way if one of us is hit there'll still be one to defend the position!" Thereupon the two of them took two different foxholes. Hsin Chiu-ssu turned to encourage him: "Wang Chih-ch'eng! Hold out well, and when we go back I'll commend you for valour!" Under the starlight Wang smiled and nodded. So they stuck staunchly to their posts, not in the least panic-stricken, now keeping a watch ahead, now cocking an ear to the rear. By this time the

enemy's artillery was firing further and further to their rear, and the invaders were clamouring on all the positions around. Their post was like an island stranded in the ocean. But still the enemy dared not come against this post which had given them such a heavy drubbing. Some hours passed, by midnight the wind was icy cold, their clothes and rifles were covered with frost and they had to stamp their feet to keep off the cold. Wang Chih-ch'eng called out again to Hsin Chiu-ssu: "Vice Squad Leader! It's perishing cold here, let's eat something, it won't do to go hungry." "Right," answered Hsin, and they opened their packs; the wind pierced them to the bone, and they had to close their mouths immediately after each mouthful. Only when at long last a messenger came through knee-deep snow to recall them, did they find their way back by the Polar Star, skirting the enemy forces.

When this fighter had finished his story, he looked at me with his bright, youthful eyes, and added: "Since we left home, the non-Party members have shown tremendous courage, all wanting to qualify for Party membership by valour; I'm a Party member, what should I be afraid of? If the war were to spread to the Northeast, to our Fatherland — " here his eyes clouded over, and, pointing at a Korean woman in front who with a child on her back was searching among the ruins of a gutted house, he said, "Wouldn't our old people be just like her? . . . You know, I practically never cry. I think for a man to shed tears is shameful. In the old days my mother sold me and nearly cried her eyes out, but I didn't shed a single tear. But when I came to Korea this time, and saw how the Korean people had suffered under the American devils, I cried. Now it's already spring, yet the people here haven't sown their crops; what will they eat this year? . . . If the American devils fought to our country, bombing and burning like this, we'd be worse off than Korea, because we have so many people, our villages are so close together! . . . "

That is how our men fight, this is the invincible spirit with which they resist.

And so, you will understand how, confronted with such fighters, the enemy in spite of their superiority in armaments and air support, cannot possibly win. And, what is more: even under such heavy enemy fire, the invaders' casualties far exceed ours.

Here I will take a quite ordinary company as an example. Just because this company was so ordinary, it was often the butt of other young fighters, until it came to be a kind of by-word. In this attack everybody felt this company was not fighting well; the regimental commander went in person to inspect their position, and in front of the post of one platoon in the company saw fifty-one American corpses. Although by the end only six of this platoon were left, two of them heavily wounded, nevertheless these six men were able to take prisoner the sixteen U.S. soldiers who rushed up to storm them.

In the days and nights on the south bank of the Han, our brave troops were not content with defending resolutely, making enemy corpses pile up before our positions and causing rivers of blood to flow; more important, they incessantly launched strong attacks to recapture positions, inflicting even heavier losses on the enemy. I was constantly hearing commanding officers telling their troops: "You mustn't let the enemy think they can push you around; you shouldn't just take punishment, you should hit back, hit back with all your might!"

Once a battalion of the enemy's attacking force got within one thousand metres of one of our divisional headquarters. That same evening our forces launched a fierce attack. They cut the Americans' line of retreat, practically annihilated the entire battalion, taking over eighty prisoners while very few of the enemy escaped. The political commissar of these troops told me: "When our men heard they were to counter-attack against the enemy, you can't imagine the spirits they were in. Like horses let out to grass for the first time in spring, there was no holding them! That evening from far off I could hear the artillery platoon shouting: 'Get ready — fire!' 'Get ready — fire!' The battalion commander cursed them: 'What's the use of making so much noise?' But still they went on: 'Get ready — fire!' 'Get ready — fire!' They were so excited they couldn't even hear what was said to them. One scouting squad lost contact, nobody knowing where it had got to. In fact this was because it had gone too fast, penetrating right into the heart of the enemy and wiping out a squad; it was only when it came back bringing five prisoners that we knew where it had gone. Wouldn't you call that too bold? The best joke was one of our platoon commanders, Comrade Chang Li-ch'un, a war hero who has been commended five times for valour. This time when he rushed up to the enemy's position he saw four American soldiers with their legs in sleeping bags; in this predicament, having no time to wait for the comrades to come up from behind, he first shot one, then rushed up, kicked another over, seized the remaining two by their hair and rubbed their faces in the mud, saying fiercely: 'You used to trample on us Chinese, but today you've got to bow your heads!' The two Americans didn't understand him, just showed the whites of their eyes. . . . Don't you think that every comrade of ours is like a young tiger?"

During these fierce and difficult days and nights, generals and private soldiers alike were all longing, as if for a dear friend's arrival, for the day — February 12th — when our eastern body of troops on the Han would started an offensive. And sure enough, that day, second by second, drew nearer and finally arrived. Following this, in less than three days the news was spread that two enemy divisions had been wiped out at Hoeng Sung. Our countrymen read of these two victories together as — Over 23,000 Enemy Troops Wiped Out on Han Front — victories involving many 'days and nights' and innumerable heroes' stories. After this the fighters at the front, shaking off the dust of these days and nights, crossed the broad silver Han river, which was about to melt, and withdrew in excellent order to the north bank of the river to rest. But the cowardly enemy, for two days after our withdrawal, dared not set foot on those silver mountains which shine with the spendour of our heroes.

AN ORDINARY MAN

by YANG SUO

Late autumn in Korea is likely to be cold one day and warm the next. When you hit one of those warm days, there's not a bit of wind and the hot sun laves the chill out of your bones. It's just like spring.

Not long ago, after the American brigands were routed on the western front, groups of Korean peasant refugees made their way back to their homes. The area was ravaged almost beyond recognition. Houses had been gutted by flames or blown to bits by the bombing. Charred timber was all that remained of the fine old cypresses on the mountain sides; the stacks of rice stalks piled outside the villages were reduced to grey heaps of flakey ashes. In the few thatched houses which miraculously remained intact the furnishings had been flung about in mad disarray.

Grimly, the peasants — mostly old people and children — began working to bring back some semblance of order. The heavy heads of the neglected rice crop were dragging to the ground, and the peasants wielded their knives day and night to save what they could of the harvest. No one had time to pick the cotton dangling from the split over-ripe bolls, and covering the fields like a mantle of snow.

One fine clear day, I had occasion to pass through one of those plundered little villages. A middle-aged woman, beside a well, stopped me. She wore the traditional white blouse and black skirt, and on her feet were Korean slippers with pointed curled up toes. Placing two fingers on her lips, she sucked in her breath a couple of times; then she stretched out her hand toward me and said something in Korean. I guessed that she wanted a smoke, and taking out a pack of cigarettes which was still half full, I handed it to her. Delighted, she nodded and thanked me repeatedly. After crowning her hair with a thick ring of woven grass, she set a water jug on her head and started to walk away.

Just then, three American planes flew over from behind the mountains. Banking, they made a wide circle above the village. The woman agitatedly beckoned me and I ran with her to beneath the eaves of a small house. Panting heavily, she set down the water jug and angrily shook her fist at the departing planes. She opened the door and was motioning me to enter, when a man approaching from the other side of the house attracted her attention. She shouted a barrage of words at him.

The man limping toward us was dressed in a vertically quilted uniform and carried a big bundle of fuel in his arms. As she hastened to relieve him of his burden, the woman continued to talk loudly in a scolding tone.

"It's all right," soothed the soldier quietly, in Chinese. "My wound is healed. Cutting a little wood won't hurt me."

Puzzled, I asked him, "Is this lady your mother?"

"You're way off on that," the soldier replied with a slow easy laugh, "— about 18,000 *li* off!"

I still wasn't clear. "Are you Korean or Chinese?" I persisted.

"Don't you think I look Chinese?" he countered, bantering.

By then I knew — he was a member of the Chinese volunteers. My heart was diffused with a glowing warmth. I grasped his hand and wrung it affectionately, not wanting to let go. With words and gestures, the Korean woman urged us to enter the house. Following the example of the Chinese soldier, I removed my shoes before stepping through the door. He wore no stockings, and I noticed that his right foot was bound with a white cloth.

A Korean home is heated by running under the clay floor the flue of the stove in the adjoining kitchen, which is much lower than the main room. It was comfortably warm as we sat down on the woven grass mat covering the entire floor. The Korean woman knelt opposite the Chinese volunteer and offered him the cigarettes I had given her. His eyes sparkled at the sight of them, but immediately a frown creased his brow and he pushed away her extended hand.

"It won't do," he said. "Why did you spend your hard earned money to buy cigarettes for me?"

So that was why she had begged me for a smoke! It was for the sake of this volunteer. The blood coursed stronger through my veins. Quickly, I told the soldier what had happened at the well. He stared at me during my recital, and when I finished he dropped his head and sighed.

"What can we do for the Korean peasants — they treat us so well!"

He accepted a cigarette. It was obvious he hadn't had one for a long time. He lit it and took several long drags in succession, then, leaning his back against the wall, lapsed into silence.

I scrutinized him closely. He was of medium height, with large fine eyes and long lashes in a broad face. Some wispy down covered his upper lip. There was a scar on his neck. His accent placed him from Honan province.

In response to my querries, he told me his story. The day he learned that the American bandits had set Korea to the torch and that the flames were sweeping toward the Yalu River, he gathered a few belongings. With a bag of fried flour, a water bottle and a blanket strapped to his back, he crossed thousands of miles of mountains and rivers to come to Korea to volunteer. He plunged into the fray and fought for the freedom of Korea with the same courage he would display fighting for his own country. But this taciturn Chinese didn't think of himself in those terms at all. A simple honest fellow, he didn't feel he had done anything remarkable. His only emotion was embarrassment at discussing these matters with a stranger.

Pointing to his bandaged right foot, I asked, "Is it serious?"

"It's nothing really," he replied lightly. "A bullet went through my instep, but the wound has closed already. It'll be completely healed in a couple of days."

"How many battles have you fought here?"

His reply was brief and sketchy. "Two. One at Un San, the other on the Cheng Chen River."

I wanted to get him to tell me about his battle experiences, but he didn't regard them as of the least importance. By dint of much questioning, which drew only the shortest answers, I managed to learn how he had been wounded. His squad had been assigned the task of blowing up a bridge over which the enemy was retreating. That night, they completed their mission but he was hit in the right foot. Their commissar had carried him to a ravine and was bandaging the wound when an artillery shell exploded right next to them. The volunteer passed out, and when he came to he found the lifeless body of the commissar lying on top of him. The Chinese fighters had already crossed the river in pursuit of the fleeing enemy.

He dug a shallow grave for the commissar with his trench spade and buried him. Unable to stand on his painful wound, he began crawling, looking for a first aid station, but he soon felt dizzy and fainted again. When he revived, he found himself in a mountain cave. Surrounding and watching him anxiously were white garbed Korean peasants, and kneeling beside him was the middle-aged woman in whose house he was now living.

At this point in his recital, I no longer had to prompt him. He looked at the woman, who was smiling at him with motherly affection, the way she did when he first saw her. Warming to his subject, his words flowed freely and with feeling.

"These peasants had all fled to the mountains. Though they were refugees, they saved me and treated me like something precious. I spoke Chinese to them, they spoke Korean to me — neither one could understand the other's words, but we could understand each other's ideas. This woman knows something about herb medicines. Every day she put some on my wound — and it worked fine. I'm almost recovered. They only brought me here from the cave a few days ago. Now I'm in a hurry to get back to my unit. Do you know where they are?"

I didn't. I knew that some volunteers were stationed not far from there and said I would make inquiries of them. "It won't be too late to rejoin your unit when your wound is completely healed. Take it easy a little longer," I urged him. "I'll be back in a few days and help you find your organisation."

As I stood up, the woman barred my way. She chattered with friendly insistence indicating that I should remain for dinner. The soldier leaned forward, his eyes speaking his reluctance to end our talk. "Must you go?" he pleaded softly.

Finally convincing them that I had to leave, I departed.

I couldn't get the volunteer out of mind, and late the following afternoon I returned to the little village. At the other end of the street, I spied the woman who was caring for him. Beneath a thatched lean-to, she was pushing the stone roller of a small grist mill. She dropped her work as soon as I appeared and rushed up to me. Her eyes streaming with tears, she led me to her house and pushed open the door. She pointed inside. The room was empty, the knapsack

and rifle which had been hanging on the wall were gone. I realised something had happened, but I wasn't sure just what.

As I stood, perplexed, an old man, walking in a stately gait, approached us. He was dressed in a voluminous gown with large sleeves. A beautiful white beard hung down to his chest. He addressed me in halting Chinese.

"That comrade has gone to the front. His wound was not all healed but he went just the same," said the old man slowly. "Before he left he insisted on leaving some money because he had eaten our food. He said we had been too good to him; that he must go to the front to kill some more of the enemy." The old man shook his head. "We have not been too good to him — It is he who has been too good to us."

My nose smarted and tears filled my eyes. There was an emptiness in my heart, as though I had forgotten something — I had never asked that volunteer his name!

"He is truly a good man," said the old man with a sigh, "and we Koreans will never forget him. We will cherish his name, always."

"Can you tell me his name?" I demanded excitedly.

The old man said a few words in Korean to the woman. Brushing the tears from her eyes, she produced a piece of cloth from her bosom. On the cloth were three characters which the volunteer had written himself — "Huang Yung-sheng".

A very common name. And the man who bears that name is a most ordinary person among China's millions. But it is precisely this ordinary man who best represents the great character of the Chinese people.

I opened my little notebook. On the first page is a picture of Chairman Mao and his creed: "Serve the people". Beneath Chairman Mao's signature I inscribed the three characters, "Huang Yung-sheng". This Chinese volunteer who is fighting to save world peace is serving the people — the people of the whole world. I think it only right that his name and the name of Mao Tse-tung should be linked eternally together.

THE FLAME OF VENGEANCE

by LI CHUANG

The winter nights come very early in Korea. By six o'clock it was already pitch dark. The snow-capped mountains gave out a cold greyish gleam, the distant ones fading away into infinity like a vast ocean. It was December 1st., and more than a hundred *li* to the south, in those invisible mountain ranges of Northeast Korea, the Chinese volunteers were locked in a bloody struggle with the American invaders. An artillery company, attached to the infantry, was anxious to press on as quickly as possible, to get to the assistance of their fellow volunteers who, equipped only with light arms, were fighting desperately with the enemy.

At 7 p.m. the company halted at the village of Paeng Ho Ri, to give the men and horses a much-needed rest. They arrived at this scheduled time at this small mountain village and discovered only one house. It nestled on a sunny slope, with a dark wood of pines behind it. Not a cock crowed, not a dog barked.

The political instructor, named Chang Chung, with the messenger went towards the solitary house. It had three connected rooms; the windows and doors were all gaping open, and inside was quite dark. Entering the central room, Chang Chung flashed his torch through on to the *kang* of the west room and saw lying on it, three dead bodies still wet with blood. At the same instant he noticed that his foot was trampling on something soft and yielding, and, looking down, he discovered still another corpse.

"There seems to have been fighting here very recently," he said. With the quick intuitive judgment of the soldier, he unconsciously pulled out his automatic, while the messenger too took his carbine from his shoulder.

In the west room they found nothing except the three corpses. Chang Chung turned around and hurried into the east room. On the *kang* there, everything was strewn about in disorder, except for one clothes cupboard, four or five feet high, which was standing in one corner of it, against the wall. It was a shabby old cupboard, but at this moment it was shaking slightly, and little creaking sounds came from its joints.

Chang Chung felt certain there was someone inside, so cocking his gun, he jumped on to the *kang* and pulled open the door of the cupboard. Involuntarily he gave a start. Crouching inside was a small boy. He was trembling all over

and his eyes shone with an expression of intense fear and despair. His whole ashen face betrayed complete terror.

Seeing that it was only an unarmed youngster, Chang Chung said to him gently, "Don't be afraid. We are Chinese Volunteers." The child remained numb for some time, but realising at last that it was two kindly-looking Chinese in front of him, with a sudden cry, he threw himself into Chang Chung's arms. The boy's feeble, nerveless weeping made everything clear.

The political instructor lit a candle. The messenger hastily blocked up the windows. The company commander and the soldiers, hearing the weeping, came running from all directions into the house, and soon there was not room to move in the doorway.

The boy could speak a little broken Chinese and could write fairly freely Chinese characters. Taking a pencil and a sheet of paper, the political instructor began a partly oral, partly written conversation with the boy.

With lips and pencil, the child related his tragic story. His name was Chang Tuk Kaik and his family had been moderately well-off.

At noon the day before, American soldiers had destroyed his home. They were a detachment making their way from the highway ten *li* to the west of this village, to a place fifty or sixty *li* to the north. Since the beginning of the Chinese volunteers' counter-offensive, the American forces had all of a sudden been thrown into a rout and were fleeing southwards in disorder. Most of the Korean people in their path scattered to more isolated places higher in the mountains for safety. Chang's father had intended to go too, but was reluctant to leave his potatoes and millet behind. This year the harvest in North Korea has been exceptionally good, potatoes as big as rice bowls, and millet like dog's tails. The old man had never seen such fine crops, and, because land reform had been carried out, they all belonged to him. The boy's uncle — his mother's brother — had been summoned to their home to help in storing and packing up things. The whole family was so busy they had no time for meals. At noon the day before, the American horde had suddenly hit the village. The boy had at once hid himself in a potato spit, and lay there quaking as he listened to his sisters' and sister-in-law's cries for help.

At this point in his story, the boy stood up, and said to the political instructor, "Father . . . there." He led Chang Chung and the others to a flat patch to the left of the cottage, and with the aid of the flashlight, they were able to make out the body of the boy's father, lying with his hands tied behind him, in a heap of dried grass covered with snow. The head had rolled off and lay beside the body. The boy's uncle lay with arms and legs outstretched to heaven, his whole body mutilated. The boy's small brother, aged twelve, had had his skull bashed in.

They went back into the west room to make a closer examination of the slaughter there. On the *kang* lay his two elder sisters, and his elder brother's wife. The lower parts of their bodies were naked, and in a horrible condition, blood and flesh indistinguishable, and their breasts slashed with bayonet cuts. The body of his mother, lying on the floor of the main room, was not blood-stained, and it looked as if she had been beaten to death with a club or a rifle butt.

From all the evidence it seemed certain that while the Americans were raping the three poor girls, the old mother had rushed in to their help, and so had been

the first to be killed. Afterwards the gang had stubbed to death the girls they had violated.

This was "total destruction of life and property", if you like! As the volunteers gazed at the bloody corpses and gazed at the ashen face and bloodshot eyes of the orphaned child, many of them had to wipe the tears from their eyes. Who has not got parents? Who has not got wives and children? And in the presence of this ghastly spectacle who could stop from gnashing his teeth in bitter rage?

In a loud voice, the political instructor began to address the men. "Comrades, what does Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea mean? It means avenging this child. It means avenging all the sorrows and sufferings of the Korean people. It means not allowing the things that have happened here in Paeng Ho Ri to spread north of the Yalu to our own hallowed soil!"

The soldiers were bitter in their denunciations of the Americans, and one and all showed a renewed determination to avenge the Korean people. In the frozen soil, they dug a grave to bury the bodies, and the bereaved child, sobbing pathetically, helped shovel spadeful by spadeful of earth on to the bodies of his loved ones.

The tragic spectacle took away every one's appetite for food. And the news of the cook added fuel to the fire of their resentment. He reported that he could not boil any water because he had discovered human excrement in the pot used by the family to boil rice in. This also was another little act of the Americans.

Two hours later the company prepared to move on. The boy hung on to the political instructor and repeated again and again in his strange and stilted Chinese, "I — you — go to fight." Considering his youth, the political instructor had to refuse his request. He said to him, "We will be going into battle very soon. You wait here for a little while, and we'll catch some Americans and bring them here for you to see." The child seemed to have understood everything the officer said, and immediately wrote in his note-book: "If you won't take me with you, I will go to the People's Army to find my brother." Chang Tuk Kai's elder brother was serving with the Korean People's Army.

Now the volunteers could not delay any longer and with heavy hearts they bade farewell to the little boy and started on their march. On the march, one after another of them wrote pledges, embodying their new resolutions, and handed them to the political instructor. Seven of them wrote their pledges, "We shall avenge the children of Korea!"

On the night of December 14th., southwest of Ha Kal Wu Ri this artillery company went into action. Shouldering all their equipment, they had sneaked round and penetrated the enemy's rear. They set up their guns on a small hill very near to the enemy's position. Several of them were directed on the enemy's mortar emplacement. The sky was like black lacquer. Snowflakes fell on their faces, but they were oblivious to cold and fatigue, their eyes fixed intently in the direction of the enemy, their breasts burning with an unquenchable flame of vengeance. Suddenly the enemy's artillery opened fire on our infantry, and at the same time, our guns thundered out in answer, the echoes reverberating over the valley like spring thunder. A quarter of an hour later, the enemy's guns had been silenced, and then over hill and dale our bugles sounded the call to charge.

THE AMERICAN PRISONERS

by CHAI CHUAN-JO

After the battle of Sam So Ri (south of Kun Wu Ri), the Chinese People's Volunteers ferreted a large number of American officers and men out from their hiding places in the mountain forests, in caves, in cliff fissures. The prisoners were a filthy, haggard lot; some were without shoes or hats, others had lost their clothes. A few had burrowed under hay stacks and were covered from head to foot with dried rice stalks. Officers had ripped off their shoulder insignia in an attempt to disguise themselves as enlisted men. The GIs were shivering; their noses ran. Moreover, most of the prisoners for nearly five days had been freezing, without food or water. The result was that they looked scarcely human.

The Americans were as ignorant as Syngman Rhee's troops of the policy of the Chinese Volunteers toward prisoners; in fact they had been fooled by the lies of the American imperialists into believing "To become a prisoner is to die". When our men, by signs, began to motion them to group into some semblance of order, the GIs looked at one another fearfully. Indeed, some stretched out their necks, and with closed eyes took on the melancholy expression of men waiting for death. Several refused to budge; they sat down on the ground as if to say "Kill me here and get it over with!" Only after our prisoner policy was made clear to them did they change their laughable postures. We did not have enough interpreters; we often made them understand by hand gestures — first a movement indicating "kill" immediately followed by a negative wave. Our men also gave them the best of their own rations, and boiled water for them to drink and to use for washing their faces. By these practical acts the Americans were moved to realise our policy toward prisoners. They soon were cheerfully driving our American-made vehicles down the road at flying speed.

Two wounded Americans were cared for by the security section of the political division of a certain regiment. One, who had been shot in the foot, could hobble slowly with the aid of a staff. The other had been wounded in the waist and had lost a great deal of blood. Very pale, he lay on the *kang*. His wound seemed to be extremely painful. He repeatedly stretched forth his hand and cried in a weak voice, "Tan — bai . . . " (Korean for "cigarette"). One of our young messengers, knowing that smoking would ease the GI's pain, rolled a few dozen cigarettes. Each time the American finished one, the youngster put another in

his mouth and lit it for him, carefully. Comrade Chang Kuang-yu, chief of the security section, was aware that a man with so serious a wound could not eat ordinary food. From his last two catties of flour he made fine noodles and wheat cakes, which he instructed the messenger to feed the prisoner. He also occasionally gave him coffee and chocolate. This went on for three days.

Now, the political division of the regiment organised a special unit for caring for wounded prisoners. It was composed of part of the propaganda group led by Comrade Fung Shih-yu, nine stretcher teams, two nurses, two cooks and an administrative worker — in other words a miniature field hospital.

On a nearby mountain, behind the regiment's quartermaster depot, a wounded GI was hiding. Every day he crawled down the slope to secretly peer at our People's Volunteers. He wanted to see what manner of men were these who fought so bravely and were so skilled in the art of combat. Tense and frightened, he watched for several days; but all he could observe was kindly people who dressed in crude cloth uniforms and who ate corn kernels. They carried grenades and automatic rifles just snatched from the hands of the U.S. Army. They kept busy threshing rice, grinding flour, carrying water and tidying up their area. In their spare time, they held discussions in groups of four or five. The GI could see nothing that looked particularly terrifying. Gradually he became less frightened. By the time he had worked up enough courage to decide to come down the mountain and beg for food, he was too weak from hunger and loss of blood to crawl the distance to our camp. He was nearly at death's door when a few of our men discovered him. He patted his stomach and held up four fingers to indicate that he had not eaten in four days. Our men carried him on a stretcher to the receiving unit.

On that and succeeding days, Fung Shih-yu's unit received nine wounded prisoners — four Negroes and five whites. They, added to the two original patients, made a total of eleven. Our nurses and cook looked after them as if they were our own troops. The GIs, to manifest their gratitude, would wring the hands of our Volunteers as if they never wanted to let go.

Then our regiment prepared to join in the great assault toward the 38th parallel. This would include those who had been caring for the wounded prisoners. The regimental commander sent Comrade Chiao-chun to bid the prisoners goodbye. The only way he was able to communicate with them was by one of our men translating his words into Japanese, which a captured Syngman Rhee puppet soldier rendered into English.

"Dear American brothers!" said Chiao Chun. "We the Chinese People's Volunteers are fighting for the protection of our Fatherland, peace in the Far East and the peace of the whole world. We oppose the American imperialist invasion of Korea and the new war of aggression started by the Wall Street warmongers. The peoples of China and Korea, together with all the peace-loving peoples of the world, will smash any American imperialist attack! But we are not against the American people. You have been fooled by the warmongers of Wall Street, you have been driven to Korea to be cannon-fodder. We Chinese People's Volunteers are sorry for you. We hope you will wake up and oppose the American imperialists who are the common enemy of all mankind. . . . "

Word by word, these phrases stirred the hearts of the American prisoners. It was the first time in their lives they had heard such a speech and it began

to clear their doubts and suspicions. Even the seriously wounded struggled to a sitting position so as to thank the Chinese People's Volunteers and to manifest their determination to have nothing further to do with the war. But when they heard that our men were leaving for the front, they worried that death was again imminent. They were afraid that they would be killed; that they would starve to death, freeze to death; that they would die because no one would look after their wounds.

We held a conference with members of the local government. Then our representative, Comrade Chiao Chun, and the mayor of the village issued a joint statement: 1) The safety of the prisoners was guaranteed. 2) Their food and shelter was guaranteed. 3) An urgent request was made to the reinforcements of the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers to tend to the medical needs of the wounded. In addition, the Chinese People's Volunteers presented each prisoner with three hundred dollars, Korean currency, for the GIs to use as pocket money.

When this decision was translated, the little dressing station rang with delighted acclamations. Jackson, a liberated soldier of the American Second Division, shouted, "I've got it straight now! You fellows are fighting for peace! You're the real friends of the American people. When I get home, I'm going to tell them what great things you're doing. We'll be against the Wall Street warmongers together!"

"After my wound heals," Walker, a nineteen year old soldier, yelled angrily, "I want to go with the Chinese People's Volunteers to smash the warmonger, MacArthur!"

Thomas, an old soldier, lay heavily wounded. "I've spent eighteen years in the army," he said. "I've been to twenty different countries and seen considerable action, but I've never seen any outfit that could fight like you. And I certainly never saw an army that treats prisoners as well as you do. I'll never forget you!" Thomas raised himself with an effort and fervently shook hands with our men. His eyes were streaming with tears.

When the American imperialist invasion army began its mad advance toward the Yalu River, the GIs did not know our policy with regard to prisoners. Most of them did not dare to surrender. For that reason, in our first few battles we killed and wounded three times more enemy soldiers than we took prisoner. But the Chinese People's Volunteers, based firmly on great revolutionary justice, gradually increased the proportion of prisoners in succeeding battles, after overcoming many difficulties.

At Kun Wu Ri one of our prisoner camps accommodated eight hundred and sixty-nine men from the American Second Division, Twenty-fifth Division and First Cavalry Division and other units. Besides Americans, the prisoners included Mexicans, Turks and Philippinos. These men had been taken after a fierce struggle, for they had been deceived by American imperialist slogans like: "You fight in Korea to carry out the decisions of the United Nations" and "Reach the 38th parallel and be home for Christmas". While the average GI was not entirely convinced by this false propaganda, still, for three U.S. dollars per day he was willing to go to Korea and be cannon-fodder for the invaders. Then, after we taught the prisoners patiently for a month, they began to understand.

As Sergeant First Class Wyat Duncan of the Second Service Battalion, Second Division, put it: "Before I was captured, I didn't know the character of the Chinese People's Volunteers. Now I know: You fight the most brave and treat your prisoners the most kind."

Pfc. James H. Jackson, a gunner in the 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, Second Division said, "None of us want war. I make out being captured saved my life. After I get back home, they'll never get me in another war."

"An officer in the Chinese People's Volunteers used his own first aid kit to bandage our wounds at the front," said Sergeant First Class James Maywell, of the Third Battery in the same Battalion. "I'll always remember that."

We asked them who was responsible for the war. They all bitterly blamed MacArthur. "That son of a bitch stays miles from the front while we die for the capitalists," they said. "All he does is guzzle champagne and dance in Japan. We hope you catch that old bastard and fix him good!"

In the prisoners' camp there was an officers' section containing seventy-two officer prisoners of whom three were lieutenant colonels, seventeen were majors, twenty-four were captains, nineteen were first lieutenants, five were second lieutenants and four were warrant officers. These officers were not only more muddled in their thinking than the enlisted men, but they were also more afraid of death.

One of the most reactionary of them was Lt. Col. Clark Campbell who had been a high ranking adviser to the Seventh Division, Second Army of the southern Korean puppet forces. Together with six American majors under his command he laid down his arms only after seven minutes of bloody hand-to-hand fighting with the brave men of the Eighth Company of a certain unit of our Chinese People's Volunteers, led by its valiant commander, Comrade Wang Shih-yeh. Of course, enlightening this type of American officer is somewhat more difficult. But truth and justice are on the side of the people and no reactionaries can pervert them with fallacious reasoning. Campbell had just gone through a month of study and internal struggle. He now took the lead among the officer prisoners to express ideas he never had before and concepts which were relatively true.

"I consider myself lucky to be a prisoner of the Chinese People's Volunteers," he told us. "I realise clearly that you are giving us the best possible treatment within your power. We live in the same kind of houses as you do and eat the same food; none of us have been in the least mistreated. These are things I wouldn't have thought possible before I was captured."

About the destruction of the puppet Seventh Division, he had this to say: "The reason for the defeat of the Seventh Division was, in the first place, the low morale of its men and the wretched relations among the various ranks of officers. But most important is the courage with which your soldiers fight. You're well trained; you don't fear cold or hunger. You're good at individual combat, you're good at mountain fighting, you're good at night attacks, at flank attacks and at cutting off our rear. Your tactics are excellent. Though you lack planes and heavy artillery, you win in spite of our planes and heavy artillery. I believe that with your superior mountain fighting methods, you can defeat your enemies on any kind of terrain."

The Chinese People's Volunteers responded to MacArthur's "New Year's Offensive" with tremendous blows against the American imperialists and the

puppet armies of Syngman Rhee. The Americans blamed their two previous disastrous defeats on the fact that "there had been no fixed battle line" and complained that "the fighting was unorthodox". This time, on the very fixed battle line of the 38th parallel a most orthodox battle took place. The results: the Americans and Rhee's puppet troops were smashed even worse than before, and their one hundred and fifty mile wide system of defence was completely demolished, in spite of the cover of over one thousand planes and over one thousand pieces of artillery. As the American invaders had to admit: "Under heavy artillery fire and being bombed by our planes, their well trained soldiers, carrying only burp guns and hand grenades, surged forward in waves. . . . Even an erupting volcano could not have stopped them!"

The advance elements of the Chinese People's Volunteers, after slashing through the 38th parallel, rolled on to penetrate the enemy's three lines of defence — an advance of nearly thirty-five miles. At no point of the enemy's "defence in depth" were they able to halt us. "What's special about the Americans," one of our men explained succinctly, "is that they have many planes, lots of heavy artillery, numerous tanks, plenty of vehicles — and they run very fast!"

"We were chasing them for thirty hours. There was no time," ran a report of one of our communication sections, explaining why it had failed to set up a radio station.

The heroic warriors of the Chinese People's Volunteers pursued the enemy all day and all night. They scaled mountain heights, forded icy streams, built bridges, suffered hunger and thirst. Finally, overcoming severe difficulties, near the Sui Rak Mountain north of Seoul, they caught up with the fleeing American army and cut off the retreat of many thousands of the Rhee and American brigands.

Deeply moved by our policy of well treating prisoners, a captured American soldier voluntarily wrote a letter, urging his countrymen to surrender. Before the appeal could be issued, on another part of the battlefield, another large group of Americans had already surrendered. More than two hundred men of the Nineteenth Regiment, Twenty-fourth Division had slung their rifles, muzzle down, across their backs and raised a white flag. Then they marched toward us in neat formation to surrender. Indeed, they were in much better order than they had been when fleeing in the opposite direction. Suddenly American planes and artillery opened fire on them; machine guns began to chatter. It was a despicable display of ruthless imperialist cruelty. But the men were determined to surrender. Creeping through that hell of fire, they at last reached our lines. Only one hundred and nine had escaped being killed or wounded by their own forces.

All the survivors were native Americans except for two Indians, one German and one Italian who were residents in America. Threatened with unemployment, they had been lured into becoming cannon-fodder for the invaders by three U.S. dollars per day. But when subjected to the powerful blows of the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers, they completely lost their ardor for battle. They only wanted one thing — to save their lives. A platoon leader of the Second Company, First Battalion, after his surrender kissed a letter from his wife.

"This is a letter my wife wrote before Christmas to wish me luck. She was very worried about my safety. If she could only know that I've come over to the side of the Chinese People's Volunteers, her sorrow sure would turn to joy."

A GI named Glaser, who came from a family of workers, said happily, "I was grabbed by the government on August 16th, last year. I didn't want to go at first, but the officer told me, 'Three dollars a day and no unemployment guaranteed'. Now, with you killing so many of us every day, we all want to live and to hell with the money!' "

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